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VOL. VII.

CHARGES AND SERMONS.

THE

WORKS

OF

WILLIAM PALEY, D.D.

WITH

ADDITIONAL SERMONS,

ETC. ETC.

AND A CORRECTED ACCOUNT OF THE

LIFE AND WRITINGS OF THE AUTHOR,

BY THE REV. EDMUND PALEY, A.M.
VICAR OF EASINGWOLD.

A NEW EDITION,

IN SEVEN VOLUMES.

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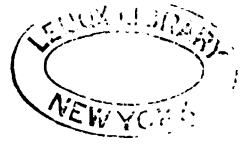

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CHARGES AND SERMONS,

OCCASIONAL AND PARTICULAR.

CHARGE I.

DELIVERED TO THE CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF CARLISLE, IN THE YEAR 1785, ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF RELIGIOUS TRACTS.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

THE choice of our venerable Diocesan—dictated, no doubt, by great partiality to me, but not without a hope, I trust, of providing for the care and government of his diocese—having called me to succeed your late excellent chancellor, I approach a station which hath been occupied by abilities so conspicuous under a just conviction of my incapacity to replace, by any qualifications I possess, the loss you have sustained of the talents and services of that valuable person: his consummate professional learning, his unwearied diligence, the reputation of his writings, the accuracy, method, and perspicuity by which they are distinguished, not only conferred honour upon the office which he held in this diocese, but have rendered his name familiar to every part of these kingdoms.

There is no branch of my duty in which I regret my own deficiency more than on those occasions in which the clergy, especially the younger and less experienced part of them, were wont, upon any doubt or emergency that arose, to resort to my predecessor for counsel and advice. I can only promise, that they shall meet in me with the same attention to their inquiries, the same readiness to communicate the information that is asked for; whilst I lament that they cannot place upon that information a like reliance, or find in it equal satisfaction and security.

The ecclesiastical laws of the realm having undergone no alteration that I am acquainted with during the course of the last year, and being yet too recent in my office to advert with sufficient exactness to any irregularities that may prevail within the cognizance of this jurisdiction, I cannot, I conceive, employ the present opportunity better than in suggesting two recommendations, of different kinds, indeed, and of very different importance, but neither perhaps undeserving of consideration.

The first thing I take the liberty to propose relates to the registering of baptisms. It has been intimated to me, by very high legal authority, that, in the investigation of pedigrees from parish registers, great uncertainty has been found to arise from the want of the family surname of the mother appearing in the entry. It is well known, that one half of the controversies which occur upon the subject of descents result from the confusion of whole blood and half blood, and the difficulty of tracing back genealogies in the maternal line. Doubts of this kind can seldom be ascertained by the register, in which nothing at present is found but the christian name of the mother; they

are rather indeed increased by consulting the register, whenever it appears, as it frequently may happen, that an ancestor has married two wives of the same christian name, and has had children by both. It is evident that this ambiguity may be completely obviated, by so easy an expedient as the addition of the maiden name of the mother to the rest of the record: it is a single question to ask, and a single word to write down. At present the entries stand thus: "John, the son of Richard Peters," for instance, "of such a place and profession, and of Mary, his wife." What I propose is, to add a parenthesis, containing the name which the mother bore before her marriage; so that the whole entry may run in this form: "John, the son of Richard Peters," particularizing, as before, the father's profession and place of residence, "and of Mary, his wife, late Johnson." For the better exposition of this plan, though it can hardly, I think, be mistaken, I have caused to be circulated, together with the book of articles, a printed formulary, which, *mutatis mutandis*, may serve as a direction where any such is wanted. I understand that this alteration has been adopted in the diocese of Norwich, and perhaps in some others, with great approbation; and if it appear likely to promote in any degree the purposes of future peace and justice, I am persuaded the little trouble it may occasion will not be grudged or declined, though the generations are yet unborn which will reap the effects of it.

The next particular to which I am desirous of inviting your attention is the distribution of religious books in our respective parishes. What I before mentioned belongs to the formal or technical part of a clergyman's duty, which, however, cannot be left undone, nor ought at any time to be done negligently;

but what I now take the liberty of suggesting, is a matter of higher character and of more serious importance, as appertaining to that which composes the substance and object of the pastoral office—the edification of the people in christian knowledge. I am apprehensive that it is not so generally known amongst us as it ought to be, that there exists in London a society for the propagation of christian knowledge, by the best method, according to my judgement, in which a society can act, by facilitating the circulation of devotional compositions and of popular treatises upon the chief subjects of practical religion. The annual subscription to this society is one guinea; in consideration of which, the subscriber is entitled to receive whatever books he may select out of a very numerous catalogue, at about half the price which the same books would cost in any other way of procuring them. The whole collection is furnished to subscribers for eighteen shillings; which, beside that it supplies a clergyman with no mean library in this species of reading, enables him to select, for the use of his parish, what he may deem best suited to the particular wants and circumstances of his parishioners.

In my opinion, this expedient of subscribing to the society, and of procuring books for the use of our poorer parishioners, upon the terms of the society, admits of the strongest argument in its favour, by which any mode of charity can be shown to be preferable to another—that of doing much good at a little expense. But beside its general utility, there are two descriptions of clergy to whom the recommendation I am now urging seems to be peculiarly applicable. It was in old times much the practice, and is at all times, as far as it can be attempted with probability of success, the duty of the parochial clergy to hold personal conferences with

their parishioners upon religious subjects; nevertheless, it is very true, that many clergymen of great worth and learning find themselves unapt for this exercise; they find a want of that presence of mind and promptness of thought which enable a man to say at the proper instant what he afterwards discovers ought to have been said, or to discourse freely and persuasively upon subjects of importance, and yet with truth and correctness.

Amongst many excellencies, it is one defect of a retired and studious life, that it indisposes men from entering with ease and familiarity into the conversation of the mixed ranks of human society. Now the only substitute for religious conversation is religious reading. A clergyman, therefore, who believes some application to the consciences of his parishioners more appropriate and domestic than addresses from the pulpit to be his duty, and that some instruction is wanting more minute and circumstantial than befits the decorum of public discourses, but who finds himself embarrassed by every endeavour to introduce conferences with them upon serious topics, will receive some contentment to his thoughts from being able to supply, in a good degree, the place and effect of such conferences, by putting into the hands of his parishioners plain and affecting treatises upon the subjects to which he wishes to draw their meditations.

The next class of parochial clergy who, I think, may avail themselves of this expedient with singular propriety, is that of nonresident incumbents: it is a mode of instruction in their power, and the only one that is so. By this means, though absent in body, they may in some measure, as the Apostle speaks, be present in spirit; not entirely forgetful of their cure, or so re-

gardless of the charge that hath been committed to them, as to consider themselves under no other relation to their parish than as having an estate in it. It is not my design to examine the legal or conscientious excuses of nonresidents; it is enough for my present purpose to observe, that even where both exist, and under the most justifiable circumstances, something is not done by the minister for the advantage of his flock, which might be done if he was living amongst them. This deficiency a good man will desire to make up; and, after due care and circumspection in the choice of a curate, I know not by what better method the incumbent of a parish can compensate for his absence than by a judicious distribution of religious books amongst his parishioners.

CHARGE II.

ON THE OATHS OF CHURCHWARDENS.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

I KNOW nothing in which the obligation of an oath is so egregiously trifled with, or rather in which that obligation is so entirely overlooked, as in the office of a Churchwarden; and in no part of their duty is this inadvertency more observable than in the answers which are returned in the book of articles. It does not seem to occur to the apprehension of Churchwardens that this is a business in which their consciences are at all concerned, or to which their oath extends. I must entreat, therefore, my Reverend Brethren, your concurrence with me in endeavouring to remind your respective Churchwardens of this branch of their office, and your and their attention for a few minutes, whilst I attempt to show how Churchwardens stand obliged by their oath in filling up, as it is called, the book of articles, to deliver careful, well-considered, true, and explicit answers to the questions proposed to them.

The Churchwarden's oath, after some controversy and much deliberation between the best civilians and common lawyers of the age, was settled in its present form, with a view on the one hand of binding the Churchwarden to every thing that properly belongs to his office, and with due caution on the other not to leave it in the power of the Ordinary to cast upon him what

burthens he pleased. The concluding clause of this oath is that by which the Churchwarden swears, "according to the best of his skill and judgement, to present such things and persons as are presentable by the laws ecclesiastical of this realm;" but lest his skill and judgement should not be sufficient to inform him what things are and what things are not presentable by the laws of the realm, a book of articles is put into his hands to supply that information; so that it is, in truth, a book of instruction to the Churchwarden in the discharge of his duty. A conscientious man, who remembers that he has sworn to present such things as are presentable, will be led in the first place to inquire what things are presentable; and this inquiry the contents of the book of articles satisfy, by enumerating and disposing, under different titles, the matters which are ordinarily presentable, and to which consequently his oath extends. Emergent cases may arise which are not comprehended in the book, but they are few; the plain account of the connexion between the oath and the articles is this—the oath obliges the Churchwarden to present such things as are presentable, the articles let him know what these things are. There are a few chapels within this district which do not receive books of articles at all. I am sorry there are any such: for since the Chapelwardens of these places swear to present such things as are presentable, unless they can take upon themselves to judge what things are presentable, and will frame presentments according to that judgement, they ought not to refuse the assistance that is held out to them; it is not consistent with their oath to do so. It was expected, I have no doubt, that they should resort to the mother church, and return their presentments in the general articles of the parish; but

this is neither convenient nor often practised. Suppose, for instance, there being any irrepair in the fabric of the chapel, the fence of the chapel yard, or of any of the buildings belonging to its estate, or any insufficiency in any article employed about divine service, such defects are things presentable; yet how is the Chapelwarden to present them, if he neither receive a separate book of articles, nor join in answering the book sent to the parish church, nor return written presentments of his own? The expense of a book of articles is trifling, and what the Chapelwarden is undoubtedly entitled to bring into his accounts.

These instances, however, are not numerous. A subject of much more general complaint is the heedlessness and negligence with which answers are returned; upon which account I wish to impress upon the minds of Churchwardens this one weighty reflection, that every answer they give is an answer upon oath. I am afraid this is little attended to, or hardly indeed understood to be the case, by reason that the oath is not taken at the same time that the answers are put down, and because the Churchwarden is not separately sworn to the truth of each answer; but where is the difference, in a view of religious or moral probity, whether a person swears distinctly to the truth of each answer, or swears beforehand and once for all, that he will make true answers to the questions that shall be asked him; or where is the difference whether this oath be taken at the time or some months before? Now observe how this applies to the case of a Churchwarden: upon his admission to his office he solemnly swears "that he will present such things and persons as are presentable, according to the best of his skill and judgement." Near the conclusion of his office, at the di-

stance of almost a year, but still under the continued obligation, and as it ought to be, under the consciousness of his oath, he comes to make his presentments, by subscribing answers in the margin of the book of articles, when the several matters presentable are enumerated, and proposed to his consideration in distinct interrogatories. Can any thing be plainer than that the force of the oath attaches upon these answers? and that every false and (what is a species of falsehood, because it is a suppression of truth), every imperfect answer that is returned, must be deemed, in the consideration of reason and religion, and why may we not say in the sight of God, a violation of the oath; and moreover, that every heedless or negligent answer that is returned, though certainly not to be placed upon a level with deliberate misrepresentation, is yet heedlessness and negligence under the most solemn of all human obligations. I should not willingly believe that this point is known to Churchwardens, when I remark the irregular, unconsidered, and defective returns that are made in the book of articles, or the slovenly hurried manner in which the business is executed: sometimes, I believe, in the very morning of the visitation, or at setting off upon their journey to it, in a few minutes when the Churchwardens can be got together, or at the close of a parish meeting, without time, without inquiry, without consultation. Is this the conduct of serious men under the obligation of an oath, or of men concerned for the honest discharge of their duty? The effect of this inadvertency I have frequent occasion to witness. To many articles, and sometimes to whole pages or to whole titles in the book, no answer whatever is returned. This is always wrong, for if things are as they should be in the matter inquired after, there

can be no objection to the saying so: if they be not, of which this silence indeed is a negative confession, they ought to present, at once; that is, the case ought to be stated fully, truly, and exactly as it is. At other times a short answer of yes or no is given, when a circumstantial specification is necessary to convey the information that is sought for by the inquiry; this holds particularly of those parts of the inquiry which relate to the state of the church, of the churchyard, of the articles employed in the celebration of divine service, or of the buildings upon the glebe. At other times the question is not answered by the reply, but eluded; such as by saying, "as usual," "as it has been," "as formerly:" from which it is impossible for the Ordinary to form any correct opinion, much less to found upon it any judicial cognizance; all which arises, partly from the easiness with which men sign what they would not say; partly, as hath been observed, from their unconsciousness of their oath; and partly from the fear of bringing blame or trouble upon themselves, by giving occasion to further proceedings: motives which cannot be justified upon any principles of moral integrity.

Amidst the various duties of Churchwardens, that which more particularly belongs to the design of my visitation, and that indeed which composes one of the most useful, at least one of the most practicable parts of their function, is the care of the church, and of the decency, order, cleanliness, and sufficiency of every thing within it and belonging to it. To this branch of their office the provisions of law are perfectly adequate; there is neither any defect in their powers, nor any obscurity in their duty: the whole of both may be comprised in almost one sentence. Repairs, the Churchwarden may always make of his own autho-

rity, and the parish in vestry assembled is bound upon his requisition to lay an assessment to defray the expenses, and if they refuse, he may lay one himself, and the persons charged may be compelled by the process of the Ecclesiastical Court to pay their quota. Under this word repair is included every thing that is necessary to keep up, or restore to their former condition, the fabric of the church, its roof, windows, plaster, floor, pulpit, reading desk, and seats (where the seats are repaired by the parish at large), and also the fence of the churchyard; likewise the replacing of books, surplices, bier and bier cloth, communion cloth and communion linen, plate, chalices and cups, when any of them are damaged or decayed. For the supply of these, as occasion requires, the Churchwarden wants no authority but his own; and for the defect, if they be not supplied, he is personally answerable, and subjects himself to ecclesiastical censure. Alterations and improvements stand upon a different footing: before these can be undertaken, the consent and resolution of a vestry must be had, and it must be a general vestry of the parish, assembled in pursuance of public notice, specifying the occasion upon which they are to meet; but even here a majority binds the whole. In strictness and for the purpose of enforcing the payment of the rate to any alteration, the faculty or consent of the Ordinary is further necessary; and where the alteration is either considerable of itself or likely to be opposed, that consent, in prudence as well as regularity, ought to be applied for. The example of many parishes in this diocese, in some of which churches have lately been rebuilt, and in others new seated, newly fitted up, shows that these improvements are so sanctioned and countenanced by law, as to be entered upon with ease and

safety by the persons who engage in them; and also shows that there is not entirely wanting amongst us a sense of religious decency and decorum, and a disposition to have the public worship of Almighty God conducted with reverence, solemnity, piety, and order.

CHARGE III.

ON PARISH CLERKS.

MY REVEREND BRETHREN,

I DESIRE it to be distinctly understood, that the delay of the visitation, which, I am sensible, must be attended with inconveniency, both to the Churchwardens who have been detained in their office, and to all who attend here at this advanced season of the year, is occasioned solely by the change that has taken place in the see; which change frustrated the late bishop's intention of visiting the diocese himself in the course of the summer, and suspended my authority to hold any visitation at all.

As it hath been usual upon this occasion to notice any alterations that may have taken place in the laws relating to the church or to religion, I mention what, no doubt, is well known to most of you, that in the last session of parliament an act passed in favour of the Roman catholics, which, upon the condition of their taking an oath therein prescribed, consolidating what may be called the civil part of the several oaths of allegiance, abjuration, and supremacy, places them nearly upon a level with other dissenters from the established church, except in the capacity of voting for members of parliament, or of sitting in either house of parliament themselves. It repeals the penal laws which passed against them in the reigns of Elizabeth and William and Mary; which laws had been dictated by

the fears that were entertained, in one case for the reformation, in the other for the revolution. It authorizes their public worship, and their places of worship, in like manner as the meetings of dissenting congregations, provided the places be what is called licensed; that is, described and recorded in the entries of the quarter sessions. It authorizes, subject, however, to the same condition, their schools and schoolmasters, provided they do not receive into them the children of protestant fathers; but it prohibits any foundation or endowment of such schools. It lays open to the Roman catholics the profession of the law, in its several descriptions of counsellors, proctors, and attorneys, by substituting the new oath in the place of another, by which they found themselves excluded from these employments. In the same way, it renders them capable of serving upon juries. But the part of the act which it more immediately concerns me to notify to you is that which puts them in the situation of protestant dissenters in regard to their eligibility to parish offices, and amongst these, to that of churchwarden. It directs that Roman catholics may be appointed to these offices in common with the other inhabitants of the parish; and that if they, being so appointed, object to any thing in the oaths, or the duties belonging to the office, they shall and may substitute a deputy, who is to be approved, admitted, and sworn as the principal would have been. This is all that I think it in any wise material to remark in this act; which, so far as it extends the just principles of toleration, will be received, I hope, both by the clergy and the laity, with approbation.

As I last year laid before the clergy such advice as I was able to give them, and that somewhat more at large than usual, I know not whether I can employ the

present opportunity better than in recommending to the consideration of the churchwardens and parishes the situation of many of their parish clerks, and of a certain description of schoolmasters in country villages. The change in the value of fixed payments, which in many cases is felt severely by the clergy, has absolutely ruined the provision that was intended for parish clerks. The small payments, arising in most places from houses, in some from communicants, and in some from tenements, and which, when they were fixed, might in a good degree be adequate to the trouble of the office and the station of the person who held it, are become hardly worth collecting; the consequence of which is, that some parishes within this jurisdiction have no parish clerks at all. I am hardly able to judge how the service proceeds without this assistance, where the minister and the congregation are accustomed to the want of it; but I have found, when the clerk has been occasionally absent, and his office not supplied, great confusion to arise from the want of the responses and the alternate parts of the liturgy being regularly supported; and I am afraid that some part of this inconveniency is felt where the congregation and their minister are obliged to go on as they can, without the attendance of any parish clerks at all. I am sorry, therefore, to see this defect in any parish; because it is a defect which impairs, in some degree, what we are all concerned to maintain—the decorum of public worship. There is reason also to apprehend, that the extreme scantiness of the income, which leaves some parishes without any parish clerk at all, in others obliges the minister, or whoever has the appointment, to take up with insufficient or improper persons. The remedy which I would recommend for this evil, for so I must call it, is, that,

in parishes in which the income of the parish clerk is extremely small, an allowance should be made to them by the parish, of an annual stipend, to be paid out of the church rate. I have no doubt that a vestry is authorized to do this. From the earliest times of our legal history, and long anterior to any statutes upon the subject, parishes or their vestries were corporations for the purpose of providing for public worship, and the assigning a competent salary to a parish clerk; like providing books, vestments, furniture for the communion table and church, which the law casts upon parishes in all places. This method, I am very glad to observe, is already adopted in some parishes in the diocese. I am now only expressing my wish that it may be extended to others, in which it is equally wanted.

The description of schoolmasters to which I refer is that of schools in country villages, endowed with fixed salaries of from ten to twenty pounds a year; in consideration of which they are obliged, or supposed to be obliged, to teach all the children of the parish or township that may be sent to them. The consequence of which is, that the schoolmaster is not maintained as the decency of his character and the importance of his service require that he should be; that his school is crowded with more children than the care of one man can superintend; and that he has no emolument from the number of his scholars, to reward or stimulate his exertions: and thus, upon the whole, these well intended benefactions do more harm than good. Wherever this is the case, and cases of this sort abound in the diocese, I would earnestly recommend, that, in addition to the fixed salary, the scholars should pay half quarterage.

By this means, with a very moderate charge upon the inhabitants, the income of the schoolmaster will be advanced to something like a provision for his decent support; and he will find, in the profits of his school, what every man ought to find, an advantage proportioned to his abilities and diligence, by an increase of which parents will be amply repaid for the expense that they incur. The endowment will not be thrown away; but, on the contrary, made to answer a better purpose to all persons interested in it than it does at present: the schoolmaster will receive the benefit of it, in having a certainty to depend upon; and the inhabitants will save one half of what they must otherwise pay for the same instruction.

I cannot conclude this charge without adding one more to the miscellaneous subjects which compose it. It may be expected that the bishop will next year hold a public confirmation: this solemnity may become the instrument of many good purposes; but its utility depends entirely upon the preparation that is made for it, and, in my opinion, upon another circumstance, which is little attended to, that of not bringing young persons to it too soon; I should think the age of fourteen was quite as early as any impression could be received from it that was likely to last. But what I wish to recommend upon this subject is, to distribute among the catechumens a tract published by the present bishop of Landaff, entitled "An Address to Young Persons after Confirmation," and which appears to me to be by much the best adapted to the occasion of any that I have seen. Such of the clergy as may not find it convenient to distribute the pamphlet at their own expense will do well to put their parishioners in the way of procuring it for themselves.

CHARGE IV.

ON AFTERNOON LECTURES.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

Of every ecclesiastical constitution the essential part is the parochial clergy; so much more important, indeed, do they appear to me than any other part of our establishment, that other parts, in my judgement, are only so far valuable, and so far worth retaining, as they contribute, or can be made to contribute, to the good order, the reward, or the encouragement of this. The incumbent of a parish, resident among his flock, and engaged in the quiet and serious exercise of his duty, composes one of the most respectable characters of human society; and, notwithstanding that insensibility both to public merit and to religious concerns which is complained of, and justly complained of amongst us, a character of this description will never fail of obtaining the sincere esteem and veneration of mankind.

The duty of a Christian teacher is of two kinds: one kind consists in a regular performance of the various services which are prescribed by the laws and canons of the church; this may be called the technical part of our office: the other kind consists in such a laying out for opportunities of working by every means upon the consciences and understandings of those committed to our care, as is prompted by a firm conviction in ourselves of the truth of Christianity, and a corresponding

solicitude to bring men to the knowledge and practice of its duties; this may be called the effective and substantial part of our occupation. Of the former it may be observed, that whilst it is indispensable, in point of decency and order,—whilst it is all which any form of church government, or any system of ecclesiastical discipline, can enforce,—it may yet fall far short of a faithful discharge of our public trust: a man may comply with every article of the rubric, and every direction of the canons; and yet perform to his parishioners a cold, reluctant, and ineffectual service. On the other hand, where the principle I have described has taken due possession of the mind, a clergyman no longer asks concerning any expedient which occurs, or which is suggested to him, whether it be required by law, or whether he can be censured for the neglect of it; but whether the expedient itself be likely to produce any solid effect upon the religious character of the persons with whom he has to deal. I have premised this reflection, in order to introduce to your notice the recommendation of a practice, which I have reason to believe would be attended with beneficial consequences to many congregations. The practice I wish to recommend is the expounding portions of Scripture after evening service; and I must request your indulgence, whilst I lay before you what has occurred to me concerning the use and practicability of this expedient. The advantages which I apprehend would result from such interpretations of Scripture are either direct or consequential. The end immediately aimed at is to produce amongst the people a more general and familiar acquaintance with the records of our religion than is at present to be met with. I am one of those who think that the Christian Scriptures speak, in a great measure, for

themselves; and that the best service we can render to our parishioners is to induce them to read these Scriptures at home, and with attention. Now the way to induce men to read, is to enable them to understand. When a private person, reading the Scripture, is stopped by perpetual difficulties, he grows tired of the employment; on the other hand, when he is furnished as he proceeds with illustrations of apparent obscurities, or answers to obvious doubts, the attention is both engaged, sustained, and gratified. There are difficulties in Scripture, in common with all ancient books, which cannot be resolved, if resolved at all, without a minute and critical disquisition, which will end probably at last in a dubious or controverted explication. Topics like these cannot be accommodated to the apprehension of a popular audience, or be successfully agitated in a public discourse. Again, there are difficulties which a simple recourse to the original,—to a parallel text,—to circumstances of time, occasion, and place,—or a short reference to some usage or opinion then prevailing, or to some passage in the history of that age and country, —will render clear and easy. Points of this sort may be set forth, to the greatest part of every congregation, with advantage to their minds, and with great satisfaction. I am apt also to believe, that admonitions against any particular vice may be delivered, in commenting upon a text in which such vice is reproved, with more weight and efficacy than in any other form.

This describes the direct purpose to be aimed at in the exercise I am recommending; but there is also a secondary object, of no small utility, which it will be found in a good measure to promote, and that is, the increasing of the afternoon congregations. Some expedient for this end is peculiarly necessary in this

diocese, in most parishes of which the inhabitants are dispersed through a wide district, living, some one, some two or three miles distant from their church, which is commonly situated in a small village, or within the vicinage of a few straggling houses. Where the parishioners must go so far to church, if nothing but evening service be performed, they do not go at all; and their vacant afternoons are often so ill employed, that I am afraid it may be said, of a numerous part of many parishes, that Sunday is the worst spent day of the week. This thinness and desertion of the afternoon congregation no incumbent of a country parish can be insensible of; and there are two ways of treating the evil; one, in discontinuing evening service entirely,—the other, in endeavouring to bring our parishioners to it. Which of those resolutions is more conscientious, and more satisfactory, judge ye. Now, I have reason to believe, that this want of due attendance would be remedied by some such exertion, on the part of the minister, as that I am now suggesting. As I did not think myself at liberty to recommend an experiment to others which I had not tried myself, I have for some short time past attempted these expositions in my own parish church, and I will tell you the result. The afternoon congregation, which consisted of a few aged persons in the neighbourhood of the church, seldom amounted to more than twelve or fifteen; since the time I commenced this practice, the congregation have advanced from under twenty to above two hundred. This is a fact worthy your observation; because I have not a doubt but every clergyman, who makes a like attempt, will meet with the same success, and many, I am persuaded, with much more. The increase of the con-

gregation was greater than I looked for, and some abatements are to be made; some effect must be attributed to novelty, which, of course, will not hold long; perhaps, also, there exists some small diminution of the morning congregation: but, with both these deductions, it still shows, as far as a single instance can show it, the complete efficacy of the expedient for the purpose of collecting a congregation. I am ready to admit, that much of the same benefit would arise from many other modes of instruction: from lectures upon the Catechism, upon the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Commandments, the Thirty-nine Articles; and if any clergyman prefers any of these matters to that which I am suggesting, or judges himself better prepared for one than the other, he certainly ought to exercise his discretion in adopting what he thinks best. All that I mean to advance, is that *something* should be done. This opportunity could not be less usefully employed than in setting one good thing in competition with another good thing; or, where both are excellent, in contending which is best. Nevertheless, I may be allowed to remark, that expositions of Scripture possess manifest advantage over other schemes of teaching; that they supply a more extensive variety of subject; as one short chapter, or half of a long one, will always be sufficient for one occasion. A lecturer may hold on for a considerable length of time before he be brought back to begin his course anew, or to repeat what has been heard before.

Having thus stated what I apprehend to be the use of this expedient, it remains that I add something to show its practicability; for whatever was the advantage or merit of the plan, if it was only practicable by men of extraordinary attainments, I should not have proposed it in this place—such men want no directions

from me; but unless I am much deceived in my notions of this measure, it will be found as easy in the execution as it is laudable in the design. Any one commentary upon the New Testament will supply materials for the work, and is indeed all the apparatus necessary for undertaking it. I say any one; because those subtle and recondite criticisms, in which different commentators hold different opinions, cannot be brought within the compass of this design. Grotius, Whitby, Hammond, Clark, and, above all, Doddridge, will any of them be found to contain what is sufficient for the present purpose. I mention this last author in preference to the rest, because his paraphrase, beside that it for the most part exhibits a sound and judicious interpretation of the text, is both more copious and expressive, in clearer and better-chosen terms, than any other I have met with—qualities which render it peculiarly adapted to the province of public expounding. His notes likewise discover great learning, and in many instances much sagacity and acuteness. But in recommending this author, it is necessary to warn you against a part of his work, extremely unlike and unworthy of the rest; and that is, what he calls his improvements of the several sections, into which he divides the text. These improvements betray such a straining to raise reflections out of passages of Scripture, for which there is often no just place or real foundation,—and are delivered in a style so impassioned, not to say fantastical, at least so inconsistent with the sober and temperate judgement which pervades the paraphrase itself,—that no account can be given of the incongruity, but that this excellent person found it necessary to accommodate his language to the prevailing tone of the dissenting congregations of those times. All that I mean to guard

against is, that I may not be thought, in praising the work itself, to recommend to your imitation this part of it.

I have said that any one commentary will furnish what is necessary for expounding Scripture to a mixed congregation; nevertheless, I must take the liberty of adding, to the younger clergy especially, a recommendation which, whether applied to this purpose or not, will be found an useful direction in the conduct of their studies; and that is, to provide themselves with an interleaved Greek Testament, into the blank pages of which they may not only transcribe the substance of such commentary as they regularly go through, but in which they may, from time to time, insert such occasional remarks on any text as they happen to collect in the course of their reading: this in time will grow into a commentary, in some measure, of a man's own; it will possess more variety and selection, as well as be more familiar and commodious to the compiler himself, than any published commentary can be.

For the purpose of public expounding, a different preparation will be necessary for different persons, and for the same person in the progress of the undertaking: one may choose at first to write down the greatest part of what he delivers; another may find it sufficient to have before him the substance of the observations he means to offer, which will gradually contract itself into heads, or notes, or common-places, upon which he will dilate and enlarge at his discretion. In the mode also of conducting the work great room is left for difference of choice: one may choose to expound the Second Lesson; another, the Gospel of the day; another, portions of Scripture selected by himself; and to another, it may appear best to begin with a Gospel and go re-

gularly forward; which last method I have practised, as the most simple and connected. But in this last method I should propose, after having finished one Gospel, to proceed to such portions of the rest as contained something different from what was found in the first, which portions are pointed out in every harmony. The congregation would find themselves greatly assisted if they could be prevailed upon to bring their Bibles along with them to church, that they might have their eye upon the text whilst the minister was delivering his exposition. I hardly need observe, that in country parishes this scheme is only practicable during the summer season, when the length of the day and the state of the roads easily admit of the parishioners' coming twice a day to church.

I have made this recommendation the subject of my present address, because I know not any by which I could detain you so well worthy your consideration and regard. The best and highest purpose of these meetings would be answered, if, by a communication of sentiment and observation, we could be made to profit by one another's experience and by one another's judgement; that, by cheerfully imparting to our brethren whatever any of us may have found conducive to the object of our common profession and our common endeavour, we may provoke one another to love and to good works, and carry on the great business of public instruction with united zeal, information, and ability.

CHARGE V.

ON THE STUDIES SUITABLE TO THE CLERGY.

REVERENDBRETHREN,

ADDRESSING an audience of clergymen and scholars, I cannot be improperly employed in pointing out to their attention, especially to that of the younger and less experienced, a few plain rules for the conduct and assistance of their professional studies. And these rules I may in some sort call mechanical, because as to the more important qualities, which are the foundation of success in literary pursuits, taste, judgement, and erudition; they are very imperfectly, if at all the subjects of rules, and certainly cannot be taught by any which it is in my power to deliver.

It may seem the tritest of all trite topics to recommend study to clergymen; but I am persuaded that very few who have not fallen into studious habits are sufficiently sensible how conducive they are to satisfaction. And to no person can they, in this view, be of so much importance as to us; I mean to such of us as have no other employment than our profession. The chief fault of a clergyman's life is the want of constant engagement. There is no way of supplying this vacancy so good as study, because there is hardly any other method of spending time which does not oblige or tempt us to spend also money. They, and they alone, who have experienced the difference, can tell how rapidly, how [illegible], and how cheerfully the

time passes which is passed in study; and how tedious and wearisome leisure oftentimes becomes without it. I must be understood, however, to speak of something which deserves the name of study, for mere reading, without thought, method, or distinction, does not come up to this character. In truth, it may be rendered so much an amusement as to be entitled to no other name, rank, or merit; and what is worse, when followed merely as an amusement, it ceases to be even that. Light entertaining reading ought to be the relaxation, not the employment of a vigorous mind; not the substance of our intellectual food, but the seasoning or the desert.

Supposing, therefore, a clergyman to be conscious of a great deal of unoccupied time, and desirous of applying it to the improvement of his knowledge and his usefulness, and that more particularly in discharging the duties of his office, I would strongly recommend to him the revival of two old fashioned but excellent helps to learning—an interleaved Bible and a common-place book.

In the last age, when study was more in fashion than it is, and when the studies of clergymen were more appropriated to their calling than they are, no man of character in the profession was without a Bible, or at least a Greek Testament interleaved with blank pages. It was usual to divide the page into two columns, in one of which he inserted from time to time such comments and remarks upon each text as struck him in the course of his various readings, and as struck him by their value and probability; for it was not intended by the person who provided himself with this apparatus to transcribe into his manuscript any continued comment, merely for the purpose of reading in his own handwriting what he might read in the original, but to

enable him to find at once, and in its proper place, what lies dispersed in different authors. The other column was set apart for observations, or perhaps conjectures, which had at any time occurred to himself whilst reading the Scriptures or hearing them read. When a number of years had replenished this collection, it became a treasure; for it became both a grateful and edifying employment to peruse a chapter, the lesson for instance of the day, with the remarks and information before him which former thoughts or researches had suggested.

That excellent prelate, with the close of whose studious life it was my lot to be intimately acquainted, for many years took great delight in these recollections. Old age never appeared more venerable than when so employed.

Another useful contrivance was a common-place book. This may be serviceable in every branch of science, and in every species of study; but it is for me only at present to render it as applicable to the studies of a clergyman, and especially to what every clergyman must wish to be provided with, a due choice and variety of subjects for his public discourses, and an assortment of topics suitable to each. Mr. Locke long ago observed, that the most valuable of our thoughts are those which drop as it were into the mind by accident; and no one exercised in these matters will be backward to allow, that they are almost always preferable to what is forced up from the mind by pumping, or as Milton has more strongly expressed it, "wrung like drops of blood from the nose," that is, in plainer terms, to such as we are compelled to furnish at the time. This being so, it becomes of consequence to possess some means of preserving those ideas which our more fortunate mo-

ments may cast up, and to preserve them in such order and arrangement that we can turn to them when we want them. I recommend, therefore, for this purpose, a common-place book for sermons, so contrived as to answer two ends; first, to collect proper subjects, and secondly, under each subject to collect proper sentiments. Whenever, which will happen more frequently than we expect, reading, meditation, conversation, especially with persons of the same class and rank of life as our congregations are composed of, what we hear them say, or what we perceive them to think, shall suggest any useful subject of discourse, of explanation, advice, caution, or instruction, let it be marked down at the time. We may not want it at the time, but let it be marked down. A distinct subject should stand at the head of a distinct page, and have a whole page left to it, in order that when afterwards any thing relating to the same subject is presented to our minds, it may be inserted under its proper head. By which means, when we sit down to the composition of a sermon, we have only to go to our book for a subject, and not only for a subject, but for many of the sentiments which belong to it, and the division of argument into which our doctrine will run. And these are more likely to be natural, solid, and useful, from the very circumstance of having occurred spontaneously and occasionally, instead of being sought by labour and straining.

In the office of composition, to which the remainder of my address will relate, there are three directions which appear to me to comprehend all that can be laid down as to artificial assistance. These are repeated transcribing, repeated revisions, and revisions with intervals of considerable length. The late Mr. Hartley,

whose knowledge of human understanding no one will dispute, whenever he saw a faulty composition, was wont to say it had not been written over often enough. Whatever be the cause of it, there is no position of the mind which brings the attention so closely and separately to the words of a composition, both to their choice and arrangement, or which enables a writer to descry so readily his own mistakes and oversights as that in which the act of transcribing places him. No man ever sketches over his composition without mending it. By reading, he may judge perhaps better of the texture and disposition of the argument, than by writing, because he takes in more parts at once; his eye surveys a larger field: but for the language, for a minute and, as I have called it, separate attention to sentences, expressions, and even words, and for all the advantage which a vigorous scrutiny can give, in point of correctness and propriety, one writing is worth many readings. It may be said, perhaps, that so much anxiety about diction will destroy one of the best properties of popular writing, ease of style and manner. The very reverse of this is the truth, unless we choose to call slovenliness ease. There are no compositions in the language which have been so admired for this very quality of ease as those of Mr. Sterne, yet none, I believe, ever cost their author more trouble. I remember to have seen a letter of his, in which he speaks of himself as having been incessantly employed for six months upon one small volume. I mention this for the sake of those who are not sufficiently apprised, that in writing, as in many other things, ease is not the result of negligence, but the perfection of art.

But, secondly, I would recommend frequent revisals of every thing you write. This advice is more parti-

cularly necessary to young composers, and it is necessary on this account; of most men it may be said, that the genius is ripe before the judgement. The imagination is at its perfection about thirty. It opens with the bloom of youth, and sometimes does not survive it; on the contrary, the judgement seldom attains its maturity till much later. Being in a great measure the fruit of experience, it is of slow growth, and is in a state, perhaps, of constant progress, at least so long as the powers of the understanding remain entire. He, therefore, who addresses himself to any species of composition in the earlier part of his life, comes to it with the advantage of a fertile and glowing imagination, but often with great imbecility and unsoundness of judgement. Any man who peruses, after a lapse of years, his early productions, will be sensible of this. This danger, arising from the constitution of the human mind, can only be guarded against by two precautions —patience in writing and industry in revising. Upon the question of slow or rapid composition, I have nothing to deliver; every man must be guided by the experience of his own faculties. In general, I think, slow composition does not answer well, for what is composed slowly must necessarily be composed a little at a time, the consequence of which is, that the piecings and joinings will be numerous and difficult to unravel; perhaps, also, the flow of thought ought not to be interrupted too often. But in proportion as the first sketch or draught of any work is hastily struck off, a more careful and rigorous correction ought to be applied. In the process of composing a man puts down every thing. When he comes, therefore, to exercise a second and severer judgement, a large crop of weed will fall before him. And it is not one revision nor two that will be sufficient.

Many faults will escape a first, many a second scrutiny, and it is only by a successive application of the attention, that accuracy, I mean such a degree of it as every one would wish to give to his compositions, can be finally attained.

But, thirdly, it is necessary that these revisions be made at due distances of time. A very simple example will show the reason of this rule. In the easiest operation of arithmetic, the casting up an account, a person may do it twenty times together, and twenty times together commit the same mistake. But if he should repeat the process at due distances of time, it is scarcely possible that that should take place. So it fares with our critical sagacity: very gross improprieties may elude examination, and if they once escape our attention, it is probable they will continue to escape it at that time, let us read over our composition ever so often. It is necessary, therefore, that the mind should come fresh to the subject, that the taste be not blunted by too much exercise, the thought too much implicated in the same trains and habits; and above all, that the familiarity of words and ideas be passed off, which, whilst it lasts, renders the perception of faults almost impossible. To me it appears, that this principle was very well known to the classic ages of literature. The *nonum prematur in annum* was not merely for the purpose of frequent revisions, for which surely a much less time would have been sufficient, but to allow such space also and distance between them, as that they might be made with the best effect. It is also of consequence to view a subject in different states of spirits, different moods of temper, and different dispositions of thought. That can hardly be wrong which pleases under all these varieties of mind or situation: that may be very much so which

pleases only in one. For instance, an inflated diction, fantastic or extravagant bold conceits, violent or daring expressions, may gratify a mind heated or elated with its subject, which, when the animal spirits were subsided and the enthusiasm gone, would appear intolerable even to the same person.

If it be asked what use may be expected from these directions, I answer, that neither these nor any other rules will of themselves form a good writer, either for the pulpit or for any thing else, but they will do that where the great essentials of genius and knowledge are present; they will prevent these inestimable qualities being thrown away, as they sometimes are, either upon crude and negligent, or upon offensive, hurtful, extravagant, or injudicious productions.

CHARGE VI.

AMUSEMENTS SUITABLE TO THE CLERGY.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

I HAVE repeatedly said from this place, that if there be any principal objection to the life of a clergyman, in regard to the sources of personal satisfaction, it is this—that it does not supply sufficient engagements to the time and thoughts of an active mind. I am ready to allow, that it is in the power only of a few to fill up every day with study; with studies solely of a theological kind, it is still less so. I do not, however, by granting this, mean to admit that it is not necessary to employ a solid portion of our time in the proper studies of our calling. On the contrary, I contend, and ever shall contend, that without a due mixture of religious reading and researches with our other employments of mind, be they what they will, and of professional studies strictly and properly so called, the character of a clergyman can neither be respectable nor sufficiently useful. When I state the want, or rather defect, of engagement, as forming the principal inconvenience in the life of a clergyman, I must be understood to speak of our profession in its general nature; under which view it may be said, that if this difficulty were removed from it, we should not have much to repine at in other lines of life; for the safety which it affords, compared with the great risk and frequent miscarriages of secular employments, and of almost all attempts to raise fortunes,

compensates in a great measure for the mediocrity, or perhaps something less than mediocrity, with which most of us, both in our views and possessions, must be content. What clergyman recollects the disappointments and distresses, the changes and failures, which the disturbed state of commerce hath lately brought upon those who are engaged in it, without seeing reason to be satisfied with—might I not say thankful for—the security and repose, the exemption from dread and anxiety, if not from actual losses and privations, by which so many have suffered?

In a clergyman's, however, in common with all other situations, a succession of agreeable engagements is necessary to the passing of life with satisfaction; and since the profession does not of its own accord supply these, or supply them to all, with sufficient copiousness and variety, and since it is of great consequence to the character of a clergyman, not only that his duties be properly performed, but that his occupations be innocent and liberal, I think it may be useful to suggest to him some pursuits and employments which will fill up his leisure with credit and advantage.

Amongst the principal of these, I should recommend, in the first place, each and every branch of natural history. The cultivation of this study has not only all the advantage of inviting to exercise and action; of carrying us abroad into the fields and into the country; of always finding something for us to do, and something to observe; of ministering objects of notice and attention to our walks and to our rides, to the most solitary retirement, or the most sequestered situation,—it has not only this advantage, but it has a much greater; it is connected with the most immediate object of our profession. Natural history is the basis of natural religion;

and to learn the principles of natural religion is to prepare the understanding for the reception of that which is revealed. In every view, therefore, it is a subject of commendation. As a mere amusement, it is of all others the most ingenuous; the best suited, and the most relative, to the profession of a clergyman. As a study, it is capable of producing the most beneficial effects upon the frame and disposition of the mind which entertains it.

Of the several branches of natural history I can only so far take notice as they are adapted to our particular situation or local opportunities. Botany is an extremely important and entertaining part of the science of nature; and there is no situation in the world more favourable to the prosecution of this study than those which many clergymen enjoy in this diocese. All mountainous regions, and none more so than ours, supply a variety of plants which are little known where the face of the country is less broken and diversified. Botanists come from a great distance to visit our mountains, and think themselves repaid for the expense and trouble of a long journey, by the opportunity of climbing amongst them for a week or a few days: yet for obtaining a knowledge of the vegetable productions of a country, for the searching out of rare plants, for the acquainting ourselves with their seasons, growth, their appearance in different states, the soil, aspect and climate which they delight in, together with their other properties or singularities, what are the few weeks, or perhaps few days of a stranger's visit, to the opportunities of a clergyman residing the year round upon the spot, and exercising his observation in every season? A wise man, in any situation into which he may be thrown, tries to compensate the inconveniences with the advantages, and to

draw from it what peculiar materials of satisfaction it may happen to afford. In the present instance, the deepest and most secluded recesses of our mountains are the best fitted for the researches I am recommending; and he who does not turn his mind to the subject when he finds himself placed in the midst of a magnificent museum, not only neglects an opportunity of rational recreation, but neglects the best thing, in some cases perhaps the only good thing, which his situation affords.

Natural history easily ascends from vegetable to animal life. No one who is a botanist, is a botanist alone. The turn of thought which directs a man to remark the structure of plants, will of course carry him to the economy of animals; and here, no doubt, is the widest space for observation, and for observation immediately tending to establish the most important truth which a human being can learn—the wisdom of God in the work of the creation. Instead of expatiating, however, upon the general utility of natural history—of which no person can think more highly than I do—it will be more to our present purpose to point out how applicable it is, and how properly it may be made to mix with those occupations into which we usually fall. We most of us become gardeners or farmers. It is not for me to censure these employments indiscriminately, but they may be carried on (the latter especially) to such an extent as to be exceedingly degrading; as so to engross our time, our thoughts and our cares, as to extinguish almost entirely the clerical character. Now, what I am recommending, namely, the scientific cultivation of botany and natural history, that is, the collecting and reading at least the elementary books upon the subject, and afterwards forming for ourselves a course and habit of observation, and which will greatly

assist and improve us, a habit also of committing our observations to writing, is the precise thing which will dignify our employments in the field and the garden; and will give to both the appearance, and not only the appearance, but the real character, of an intellectual and contemplative, as well as of an active and manual employment. If a clergyman will farm, he should not be a common farmer; if he will garden, he should not be a mere delver—let him philosophize his occupation, let him mix science with work. If he draw from his farm or garden any improvement in the knowledge of nature, he draws from it the greatest, in many cases the only, profit he will receive.

Beside natural history, or rather together with it, several branches of natural philosophy, especially those which consist in experiment and observation, are within the reach of a country clergyman's means and opportunities, and will contribute greatly to fill his time with satisfactory and useful engagement. Electrical experiments are of this kind. These I have seen executed in the greatest perfection in the back shop of a linen-draper, with an apparatus which did not cost forty shillings. The use of the microscope is also another endless source of novelty, and by consequence, of entertainment and instruction. More and more beautiful discoveries of this kind I have seen made by a private clergyman in Wales, who fabricated all his own apparatus, than by any other person whom I have known or heard of in these times. Those who display philosophical experiments to the public are wont to gratify the eyes of the spectators with the show of a costly apparatus; but a philosopher knows that almost the whole of this is embellishment; that the real effects are produced, the

real instruction is gained, with a few simple instruments in a closet as completely as at a dressed-up lecture.

Astronomy, at least so much of it (and that is a great deal) as requires only a telescope and a quadrant, is a proper, I had almost said the most proper, of all possible recreations to a clergyman. The heavens declare the glory of God to all: but to the astronomer they point it out by proofs and significations most powerful, convincing, and infinitely sublime. In common with all science, and more so, I think, than any one branch of it, the contemplation of the heavenly bodies tends to lift up the spirit of man above those entanglements of cares and difficulties with which we are all of us more than enough encumbered and weighed down. Chemistry, however, the popular part of it, may be pursued at very moderate expense, and with great advantage.

It is not my intention to run round the Encyclopædia in order to show the subjects of engagement, and the sources of information which almost every branch of natural philosophy may afford to an active, intelligent, and inquisitive mind, furnished with the leisure which our profession naturally supplies to us. I will rather content myself with briefly pointing out two articles—not so much of science, strictly so called, as of useful investigation, and suggested to our attention by the natural circumstances of the country in which we live:—the admeasurement of the height of mountains, by the application of the barometer and thermometer, is very practicable in the operation, unexpensive in the apparatus; and in no part of the island do more, or more curious subjects for trial offer themselves than in ours. Meteorological observations—that is, observations upon the phenomena of the atmosphere; such as the quantity of rain

which falls in a year, the course of the winds, the dependency of the rain upon the state of the barometer, or upon other appearances and prognostics, which in mountainous countries are always irregular—are very deserving of being known, and can only be known by a long-continued and attentive course of observation. This is more particularly true in this very neighbourhood; in which great singularities of the kind I am speaking of are said to exist, of which neither the cause has been explained, nor even the appearances themselves sufficiently ascertained.

I will beg leave to conclude with two short reflections. First; that the various sources of intellectual and active occupation which have been pointed out, prove that there is no man of liberal education who need be at a loss to know what to do with his time; that leisure need never be a burthen; that if we sink into sloth, it is our fault, and not that of our situation: and secondly, that whatever direction we give to our studies—I mean those collateral and adscititious studies which have been described—we are contributing our proportion to that which is of great importance to the general diffusion of knowledge, and thereby to the interest of religion, and the credit and usefulness of our order—the furnishing of every portion of the country, as well as of every class of the community, with the presence and society of a well informed clergy.

CHARGE VII.

USE AND PROPRIETY OF LOCAL AND OCCASIONAL PREACHING.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

THE late archbishop Secker, whose memory is entitled to public respect, as on many accounts, so especially for the judgement with which he described, and the affecting seriousness with which he recommended the duties of his profession, in one of his charges to the clergy of his diocese,* exhorts them "to make their sermons local." I have always considered this advice as founded in a knowledge of human life, but as requiring, in its application, a more than ordinary exercise of Christian prudence. Whilst I repeat therefore the rule itself, with great veneration for the authority by which it was delivered, I think it no unfit employment of the present opportunity, to enlarge so far upon its use and meaning, as to point out some of the instances in which it may be adopted, with a probability of making salutary impressions upon the minds of our hearers.

But, before I proceed, I would warn you, and that with all the solemnity that can belong to any admonition of mine, against rendering your discourses *so local*, as to be pointed and levelled at particular persons in your congregation. This species of address may produce in the party for whom it is intended confusion perhaps and shame, but not with their proper

* Archbishop of Canterbury's Third Charge to his Clergy. Abp. Secker's Works, vol. iv.

fruits of penitence and humility. Instead of which, these sensations will be accompanied with bitter resentment against the preacher, and a kind of obstinate and determined opposition to his reproof. He will impute your officiousness to personal enmity, to party spirit, to the pleasure of triumphing over an adversary without interruption or reply, to insult assuming the form of advice, or to any motive rather than a conscientious solicitude for the amendment and salvation of your flock. And as the person himself seldom profits by admonitions conveyed in this way, so are they equally useless, or perhaps noxious, to the rest of the assembly; for the moment the congregation discover to whom the chastisement is directed, from that moment they cease to apply any part of it to themselves. They are not edified, they are not affected; on the contrary, they are diverted, by descriptions of which they see the design, and by invectives of which they think they comprehend the aim. Some who would feel strongly the impropriety of gross and evident personalities may yet hope to hit their mark by covert and oblique allusions. Now of this scheme, even when conducted with the greatest skill, it may be observed, that the allusions must either be perceived, or not. If they be not perceived, they fail of the effect intended by them; if they be, they are open to the objections which lie against more explicit and undissembled attacks. Whenever we are conscious, in the composition of our discourses, of a view to particular characters in our congregation or parish, we ought to take for granted that our view will be understood. Those applications therefore, which, if they were direct, would produce more bad emotions than good ones, it is better to discard entirely from our sermons; that is to say, it is better

to lay aside the design altogether, than to attempt to disguise it by a management which is generally detected, and which, if not seen through, defeats its purpose by its obscurity. The crimes, then, of individuals let us reserve for opportunities of private and seasonable expostulation. Happy is the clergyman who has the faculty of communicating advice and remonstrance with persuasion and effect, and the virtue to seize and improve every proper occasion of doing it; but in the pulpit, let private characters be no otherwise adverted to, than as they fall in with the delineations of sins and duties which our discourses must necessarily contain, and which, whilst they avoid personalities, can never be too close or circumstantial. For the same reason that I think personal allusions reprehensible, I should condemn any, even the remotest, reference to party or political transactions and disputes. These are at all times unfit subjects, not only of discussion in the pulpit, but of hints and surmises. The Christian preacher has no other province than that of religion and morality. He is seldom led out of his way by honourable motives, and, I think, never with a beneficial effect.

Having premised this necessary caution, I return to the rule itself. By "local" sermons I would understand, what the reverend prelate who used the expression seems principally to have meant by it, sermons adapted to the particular state of thought and opinion which we perceive to prevail in our congregation. A careful attention to this circumstance is of the utmost importance, because, as *it* varies, the same sermon may do a great deal of good, none at all, or much harm. So that it is not the truth of what we are about to offer which alone we ought to consider, but whether the argu-

ment itself be likely to correct or to promote the turn and bias of opinion to which we already perceive too strong a tendency and inclination. Without this circumspection we may be found to have imitated the folly of the architect who placed his buttress on the wrong side. The more the column pressed, the more firm its construction, and the deeper its foundation—the more certainly it hastened the ruin of the fabric. I do not mean that we should, upon any emergency, advance what is not true; but that, out of many truths, we should select those, the consideration of which seems best suited to rectify the dispositions of thought, that were previously declining into error or extravagancy. For this model of preaching we may allege the highest of all possible authorities, the example of our blessed Saviour himself. He always had in view the posture of mind of the persons whom he addressed. He did not entertain the Pharisees with invectives against the open impiety of their Sadducean rivals; nor, on the other hand, did he soothe the Sadducee's ear with descriptions of Pharisaical pomp and folly. In the presence of the Pharisee he preached against hypocrisy: to the Sadducees he proved the resurrection of the dead. In like manner, of that known enmity which subsisted between the Jews and Samaritans, this faithful Teacher took no undue advantage to make friends or proselytes of either. Upon the Jews he inculcated a more comprehensive benevolence: with the Samaritan he defended the orthodoxy of the Jewish creed.

But I apprehend that I shall render my advice more intelligible, by exemplifying it in two or three instances, drawn from what appears to be the predo-

minant disposition and religious character of this country, and of the present times.

In many former ages of religion, the strong propensity of men's minds was to overvalue positive duties; which temper, when carried to excess, not only multiplied unauthorized rites and observances, not only laid an unwarrantable stress upon those which were prescribed; but, what was worst of all, led men to expect, that, by a punctual attention to the ordinances of religion, they could compound for a relaxation of its weighty and difficult duties of personal purity and relative justice. This was the depraved state of religion amongst the Jews when our Saviour appeared; and it was the degeneracy, against which some of the most forcible of his admonitions, and the severest of his reproofs, were directed. Yet, notwithstanding that Christ's own preaching, as well as the plan and spirit of his religion, were as adverse as possible to the exalting or over-valuing of positive institutions, the error which had corrupted the old dispensation revived under the new; and revived with double force, inasmuch as it went to transform Christianity into a service more prolix and burdensome than the Jewish, and to ascribe an efficacy to certain religious performances, which, in a great measure, superseded the obligations of substantial virtue. That age, however, with us, is long since past. I fear there is room to apprehend that we are falling into mistakes of a contrary kind. Sadducees are more common amongst us than Pharisees. We seem disposed, not only to cast off the decent offices, which the temperate piety of our church hath enjoined, as aids of devotion, calls to repentance, or instruments of improvement, but to contemn and neglect, under the

name of forms and ceremonies, even those rites, which, forasmuch as they were ordained by the divine Founder of our religion, or by his inspired messengers, and ordained with a view of their continuing in force through future generations, are entitled to be accounted parts of Christianity itself. In this situation of religion, and of men's thoughts with respect of it, he makes a bad choice of his subject, who discourses upon the futility of rites and ordinances, upon their insignificancy when taken by themselves, or even who insists too frequently, and in terms too strong, upon their inferiority to moral precepts. We are rather called upon to sustain the authority of those institutions which proceed from Christ or his apostles, and the reasonableness and credit of those which claim no higher original than public appointment. We are called upon to contend with respect to the first, that they cannot be omitted with safety any more than other duties; that the will of God, once ascertained, is the immediate foundation of every duty; that, when this will is known, it makes little difference to us what is the subject of it, still less by what denomination the precept is called, under what class or division the duty is arranged. If it be commanded, and we have sufficient reason to believe that it is so, it matters nothing whether the obligation be moral or natural, or positive or instituted. He who places before him the will of God as the rule of his life, will not refine, or even dwell much, upon these distinctions. The ordinances of Christianity, it is true, are all of them significant. Their meaning, and even their use, is not obscure. But were it otherwise; was the design of any positive institution inexplicable, did it appear to have been proposed only as an exercise of obedience, it was not for us to hesitate in our com-

pliance. Even to inquire, with too much curiosity and impatience, into the cause and reason of a religious command, is no evidence of an humble and submissive disposition; of a disposition, I mean, humble under the Deity's government of his creation, and submissive to his will however signified.

It may be seasonable also to maintain, what I am convinced is true, that the principle of general utility, which upholds moral obligation itself, may, in various instances, be applied to evince the duty of attending upon positive institutions; in other words, that the difference between natural and positive duties is often more in the name than in the thing. The precepts of natural justice are therefore only binding upon the conscience, because the observation of them is necessary or conducive to the prosperity and happiness of social life. If there be, as there certainly are, religious institutions which contribute greatly to form and support impressions upon the mind, that render men better members of civilised community; if these institutions can only be preserved in their reputation and influence by the general respect which is paid to them; there is the same reason to each of us for bearing our part in these observances, that there is for discharging the most acknowledged duties of natural religion. When I say "the reason is the same," I mean that it is the same in *kind*. The *degree* of strength and cogency which this reason possesses in any particular case, must always depend upon the value and importance of the particular duty; which admits of great variety. But moral and positive duties do not in this respect differ more than moral duties differ from one another. So that when men accustom themselves to look upon positive duties as universally and necessarily inferior to moral ones,

as of a subordinate species, as placed upon a different foundation, or deduced from a different original; and consequently to regard them as unworthy of being made a part of their plan of life, or of entering into their sense of obligation, they appear to be egregiously misled by names. It is our business, not to aid, but to correct, the deception. Still, nevertheless, is it as true as ever it was, that "except we exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven;" that "the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath;" that "the weightier matters of the law are faith, justice, and mercy;" but to insist strenuously, and, as some do, almost exclusively, upon these points at present, tends to diminish the respect for religious ordinances, which is already too little; and, whilst it guards against dangers that have ceased to exist, augments those which are really formidable.

Again; upon the first reformation from Popery, a method very much prevailed in the seceding churches, of resolving the whole of religion into faith—*good works*, as they were called, or the practice of virtue, holding not only a secondary but even distant place in value and esteem: being represented, indeed, as possessing no share or efficacy in the attainment of human salvation. This doctrine we have seen revived in our own times, and carried to still greater lengths. And it is a theory, or rather perhaps a language, which required, whilst it lasted, very serious animadversion; not only because it disposed men to rest in an unproductive faith, without endeavours to render themselves useful by exertion and activity; not only because it was naturally capable of being converted to the encouragement of licentiousness; but because it misre-

presented Christianity as a moral institution, by making it place little stress upon the distinction of virtue and vice, and by making it require the practice of external duties, if it required them at all, only as casual, neglected, and almost unthought of consequences of that faith which it extolled; instead of directing men's attention to them, as to those things which alone compose an unquestionable and effective obedience to the divine will. So long as this turn of mind prevailed, we could not be too industrious in bringing together and exhibiting to our hearers those many and positive declarations of Scripture which enforce, and insist upon, practical religion; which divide mankind into those who do good, and those who do evil; which hold out to the one favour and happiness, and to the other repulse and condemnation. The danger, however, from this quarter is nearly overpast. We are, on the contrary, setting up a kind of philosophical morality, detached from religion and independent of its influence, which may be cultivated, it is said, as well without Christianity as with it; and which, if cultivated, renders religion and religious institutions superfluous. A mode of thought so contrary to truth, and so derogatory from the value of revelation, cannot escape the vigilance of a Christian ministry. We are entitled to ask upon what foundation this morality rests. If it refer to the divine will (and, without that, where will it find its sanctions, or how support its authority?) there cannot be a conduct of the understanding more irrational, than to appeal to those intimations of the Deity's character which the light and order of nature afford, as to the rule and measure of our duty, yet to disregard, and affect to overlook, the declarations of his pleasure which Christianity communicates. It is

impossible to distinguish between the authority of natural and revealed religion. We are bound to receive the precepts of revelation for the same reason that we comply with the dictates of nature. He who despises a command which proceeds from his Maker, no matter by what means, or through what medium, instead of advancing, as he pretends to do, the dominion of reason, and the authority of natural religion, disobeys the first injunction of both. Although it be true what the Apostle affirms, that, "when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, they are a law unto themselves;" that is, they will be accepted together with those who are instructed in the law and obey it: yet is this truth not applicable to such, as having a law contemn it, and with the means of access to the word of God, keep themselves at a voluntary distance from it. This temper, whilst it continues, makes it necessary for us to assert the superiority of a religious principle above every other by which human conduct can be regulated—more especially above that fashionable system, which recommends virtue only as a true and refined policy; which policy in effect is, and in the end commonly proves itself to be, nothing else than a more exquisite cunning, which, by a specious behaviour in the easy and visible concerns of life, collects a fund of reputation, in order either to cherish more securely concealed vices, or to reserve itself for some great stroke of selfishness, perfidy, and desertion, in a pressing conjuncture of fortunes. Nor less justly may we superinduce the guidance of Christianity to the direction of sentiment; which depends so much upon constitution, upon early impressions, upon habit and imitation, that unless it be compared with, and adjusted by, some safer rule, it can in no

wise be trusted. Least of all ought we to yield the authority of religion to the law of honour: a law (if it deserve that name), which, besides its continual mutability, is at best but a system of manners suited to the intercourse and accommodation of higher life; and which consequently neglects every duty, and permits every vice, that has no relation to these purposes. Amongst the rules which contend with religion for the government of life, the law of the land also has not a few who think it very sufficient to act up to its direction, and to keep within the limits which it prescribes: and this sort of character is common in our congregations. We are not to omit, therefore, to apprise those who make the statutes of the realm the standard of their duty, that they propose to themselves a measure of conduct totally inadequate to the purpose. The boundaries which nature has assigned to human authority and control, the partial ends to which every legislator is obliged to confine his views, prevent human laws, even were they, what they never are, as perfect as they might be made, from becoming competent rules of life to any one who advances his hopes to the attainment of God Almighty's favour. In contradistinction, then, to these several systems, which divide a great portion of mankind amongst them, we preach "faith which worketh by love," that principle of action and restraint which is found in a Christian alone. It possesses qualities to which none of *them* can make pretensions. It operates where they fail: is present upon all occasions, firm upon the greatest; pure, as under the inspection of a vigilant omniscience; innocent, where guilt could not be discovered; just, exact, and upright, without a witness to its proceedings; uniform amidst the caprices of fashion, unchanged by the vicissitudes of popular

opinion; often applauded, not seldom misunderstood, it holds on its straight and equal course, through "good report and evil report," through encouragement and neglect, approbation and disgrace. If the philosopher or the politician can point out to us any influence but that of Christianity which has these properties, I had almost said which does not want them all, we will listen with reverence to his instruction. But until this be done, we may be permitted to resist every plan which would place virtue upon any other foundation, or seek final happiness through any other medium, than faith in Jesus Christ. At least whilst an inclination to these rival systems remains, no good end, I am apt to think, is attained by decrying faith under any form; by stating the competition between faith and good works, or by pointing out, with too much anxiety, even the abuses and extravagances into which the doctrine of salvation by faith alone has sometimes been carried. The truth is, that, in the two subjects which I have considered, we are in such haste to fly from enthusiasm and superstition, that we are approaching towards an insensibility to all religious influence. I certainly do not mean to advise you to endeavour to bring men back to enthusiasm and superstition, but to retard, if you can, their progress towards an opposite and a worse extreme; and both in these, and in all other instances, to regulate the choice of your subjects, by the particular bias and tendency of opinion which you perceive already to prevail amongst your hearers, and by a consideration, not of the truth only of what you deliver, which, however, must always be an indispensable condition, but of its effects: and those not the effects which it would produce upon sound, enlightened, and impartial judgements, but what are likely to take

place in the weak and pre-occupied understandings with which we have to do.

Having thus considered the rule as it applies to the argument of our discourses, in which its principal importance consists, I proceed to illustrate its use as it relates to another object—the means of exciting attention. The transition from local to occasional sermons is so easy, and the reason for both is so much the same, that what I have further to add will include the one as well as the other. And though nothing more be proposed in the few directions which I am about to offer than to move and awaken the attention of our audience, yet is this a purpose of no inconsiderable magnitude. We have great reason to complain of listlessness in our congregations. Whether this be their fault or ours, the fault of neither or of both, it is much to be desired that it could by any means be removed. Our sermons are in general more informing, as well as more correct and chastised both in matter and composition, than those of any denomination of dissenting teachers. I wish it were in our power to render them as impressive as some of theirs seem to be. Now I think we may observe that we are heard with somewhat more than ordinary advertency, whenever our discourses are recommended by any occasional propriety. The more, therefore, of these proprieties we contrive to weave into our preaching, the better. One which is very obvious, and which should never be neglected, is that of making our sermons as suitable as we can to the service of the day. On the principal fasts and festivals of the church, the subjects which they are designed to commemorate ought invariably to be made the subjects of our discourses. Indeed, the best sermon, if it do not treat of the argument which the con-

gregation come prepared to hear, is received with coldness, and with a sense of disappointment. This respect to the order of public worship almost every one pays. But the adaptation, I apprehend, may be carried much farther. Whenever any thing like a unity of subject is pursued throughout the collect, epistle, and gospel of the day, that subject is with great advantage revived in the pulpit. It is perhaps to be wished that this unity had been more consulted in the compilation of this part of the liturgy than it has been. When from the want of it a subject is not distinctly presented to us, there may, however, be some portion of the service more striking than the rest, some instructive parable, some interesting narration, some concise but forcible precept, some pregnant sentence, which may be recalled to the hearer's attention with peculiar effect. I think it no contemptible advantage if we even draw our text from the epistle or gospel, or the psalms or lessons. Our congregation will be more likely to retain what they hear from us, when it, in any manner, falls in with what they have been reading in their prayer-books, or when they are afterwards reminded of it by reading the psalms and lessons at home. But there is another species of accommodation of more importance, and that is the choice of such disquisitions, as may either meet the difficulties or assist the reflections which are suggested by the portions of Scripture that are delivered from the reading-desk. Thus, whilst the wars of Joshua and the Judges are related in the course of the lessons which occupy some of the first Sundays after Trinity, it will be very seasonable to explain the reasons upon which that dispensation was founded, the moral and beneficial purposes which are declared to have been designed, and which were probably accom-

plished, by its execution; because such an explanation will obviate the doubts concerning either the divine goodness or the credibility of the narrative which may arise in the mind of a hearer—who is not instructed to regard the transaction as a method of inflicting an exemplary, just, and necessary punishment. In like manner, whilst the history of the delivery of the law from mount Sinai, or rather the recapitulation of that history by Moses, in the book of Deuteronomy, is carried on in the Sunday lessons which are read between Easter and Whitsunday, we shall be well engaged in discourses upon the *commandments* which stand at the head of that institution; in showing from the history their high original and authority, and in explaining their reasonableness, application, and extent. Whilst the history of Joseph is successively presented to the congregation during the Sundays in Lent, we shall be very negligent of the opportunity, if we do not take occasion to point out to our hearers, those observations upon the benevolent but secret direction, the wise though circuitous measures, of Providence, of which this beautiful passage of Scripture supplies a train of apposite examples. There are, I doubt not, other series of subjects dictated by the service as edifying as these; but these I propose as illustrations of the rule.

Next to the service of the church, the season of the year may be made to suggest useful and appropriate topics of meditation. The beginning of a new year has belonging to it a train of very solemn reflections. In the devotional pieces of the late Dr. Johnson, this occasion was never passed by. We may learn from these writings the proper use to be made of it; and by the example of that excellent person, how much a

pious mind is wont to be affected by this memorial of the lapse of life. There are also certain proprieties which correspond with the different parts of the year. For example, the wisdom of God in the work of the creation is a theme which ought to be reserved for the return of the spring, when nature renews, as it were, her activity; when every animal is cheerful and busy, and seems to feel the influence of its Maker's kindness; when our senses and spirits, the objects and enjoyments that surround us, accord and harmonize with those sentiments of delight and gratitude, which this subject, above all others, is calculated to inspire. There is no devotion so genuine as that which flows from these meditations, because it is unforced and self-excited. There is no frame of mind more desirable, and, consequently, no preaching more useful, than that which leads the thought to this exercise. It is laying a foundation for Christianity itself. If it be not to sow the seed, it is at least to prepare the soil. The evidence of revelation arrives with much greater ease at an understanding, which is already possessed by the persuasion, that an unseen intelligence framed and conducts the universe; and which is accustomed to refer the order and operations of nature to the agency of a supreme will. The influence also of religion is almost always in proportion to the degree and strength of this conviction. It is, moreover, a species of instruction of which our hearers are more capable than we may at first sight suppose. It is not necessary to be a philosopher, or to be skilled in the names and distinctions of natural history, in order to perceive marks of contrivance and design in the creation. It is only to turn our observation to them. Now, besides that this requires neither more ability nor leisure than

every man can command, there are many things in the life of a country parishioner which will dispose his thoughts to the employment. In his fields, amidst his flocks, in the progress of vegetation, the structure, faculties, and manners, of domestic animals, he has constant occasion to remark proofs of intention and of consummate wisdom. The minister of a country parish is never, therefore, better engaged, than when he is assisting this turn of contemplation. Nor will he ever do it with so much effect, as when the appearance and face of external nature conspire with the sentiments which he wishes to excite.

Again: if we would enlarge upon the various bounty of Providence, in furnishing a regular supply for animal, and especially for human subsistence, not by one, but by numerous and diversified species of food and clothing, we shall be best heard in the time and amidst the occupations of harvest, when our hearers are reaping the effects of those contrivances for their support, and of that care for their preservation, which their Father which is in heaven hath exercised for them. If the year has been favourable, we rejoice with them in the plenty which fills their granaries, covers their tables, and feeds their families. If otherwise, or less so, we have still to remark how, through all the husbandman's disappointments, through the dangers and inclemencies of precarious seasons, a competent proportion of the fruits of the earth is conducted to its destined purpose. We may observe also to the repining farmer, that the value, if not the existence, of his own occupation, depends upon the very uncertainty of which he complains. It is found to be almost universally true, that the partition of the profits between the owner and the occupier of the soil is in favour of

the latter in proportion to the risk which he incurs by the disadvantage of the climate. This is a very just reflection, and particularly intelligible to a rural audience. We may add, when the occasion requires it, that scarcity itself hath its use: by acting as a stimulus to new exertions and to farther improvements, it often produces, through a temporary distress, a permanent benefit.

Lastly; sudden, violent, or untimely deaths, or death accompanied by any circumstances of surprise or singularity, usually leave an impression upon a whole neighbourhood. A Christian teacher is wanting in attention to opportunities who does not avail himself of this impression. The uncertainty of life requires no proof. But the power and influence which this consideration shall obtain over the decisions of the mind will depend greatly upon the circumstances under which it is presented to the imagination. Discourses upon the subject come with tenfold force, when they are directed to a heart already touched by some near, recent, and affecting example of human mortality. I do not lament that funeral sermons are discontinued amongst us. They generally contained so much of unseasonable, and oftentimes undeserved panegyric, that the hearers came away from them, rather with remarks in their mouths upon what was said of the deceased, than with any internal reflections upon the solemnity which they had left, or how nearly it related to their own condition. But by decent allusions in the stated course of our preaching to events of this sort, or by, what is better, such a well-timed choice of our subject as may lead our audience to make the allusion for themselves, it is possible, I think, to retain much of the good effect of funeral discourses, without their adulation, and without exciting vain curiosity.

If other occurrences have arisen within our neighbourhood, which serve to exemplify the progress and fate of vice, the solid advantages and ultimate success of virtue, the providential discovery of guilt or protection of innocence, the folly of avarice, the disappointments of ambition, the vanity of worldly schemes, the fallaciousness of human foresight; in a word, which may remind us, "what shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue," and thereby induce us to collect our views and endeavours to one point, the attainment of final salvation; such occurrences may be made to introduce topics of serious and useful meditation. I have heard popular preachers amongst the Methodists avail themselves of these occasions with very powerful effect. It must be acknowledged that they frequently transgress the limits of decorum and propriety, and that these transgressions wound the modesty of a cultivated ear. But the method itself is not to be blamed. Under the correction of a sounder judgement it might be rendered very beneficial. Perhaps, as hath been already intimated, the safest way is, not to refer to these incidents by any direct allusion, but merely to discourse at the time upon subjects which are allied to and connected with them.

The sum of what I have been recommending amounts to this: that we consider diligently the probable effects of our discourses, upon the particular characters and dispositions of those who are to hear them; but that we apply this consideration solely to the choice of truths, by no means to the admission of falsehood or insincerity*: Secondly, that we endeavour to profit by circumstances, that is, to assist, not the reasoning, but the efficacy of our discourses, by an opportune and

* This distinction fixes the limits of exoteric doctrine, as far as any thing called by that name is allowable to a Christian teacher.

skilful use of the service of the church, the season of the year, and of all such occurrences and situations as are capable of receiving a religious turn; and such as, being yet recent in the memory of our hearers, may dispose their minds for the admission and influence of salutary reflections.

My Reverend Brethren, I am sensible that the discourse with which I have now detained you is not of that kind which is usually delivered at a chancellor's visitation. But since (by the favour of that excellent prelate, who by me must long be remembered with gratitude and affection) I hold another public station in the diocese, I embrace the only opportunity afforded me of submitting to you that species of counsel and exhortation, which, with more propriety perhaps, you would have received from me in the character of your archdeacon, if the functions of that office had remained entire.

CHARGE VIII.

SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

REVERENDBRETHREN,

THE absence of your chancellor from the kingdom upon a mission connected with the interests of learning and with religious inquiry (and for this reason excused by his diocesan, as I hope it will be thought excusable by you), has led me to supply his place upon the present occasion.

I know of no late alteration in our ecclesiastic laws, or in the state of the church, which requires to be noticed; but I think that there is a new and growing opinion which, if it should come to prevail in the public mind, would be injurious not only to the ends proposed by the establishment of a national church, but to the general improvement of civilized life: and that opinion is, that it is not for the advantage or safety of the state that the children of the poor should receive any kind of education, or be even taught to read. This opinion I have found by experience to have been taken up of late—not as a pretence to fence off from subscribing to Sunday or charity schools; not merely as a doubt thrown out at random, but advanced politically as a grave proposition. Did I believe that there were any just foundation for this opinion, I can only say that I should lament it most extremely; because it is in the highest degree both dishonourable to human reason, and

disparaging to the institutions of social life; it, in fact, insinuates that the bulk of mankind can only be governed by the suppression and debasement of their intellectual faculties; and it likewise insinuates that the institutions of civil life rest for their support upon the ignorance of the greatest part of those who live under them. Both these opinions I believe to be false; and yet they are both implied in the doctrine of those who would alarm us with the danger of instructing the poor.

It has been said, that when the poor are once taught to read, bad books may be put into their hands:—to which it might be sufficient to give the answer which has often been given; namely, that not only liability, but proneness to abuse, adheres to every faculty, to every attainment, to every energy of our nature. But in the case before us, a more particular answer may be returned to the objection; which is this—Let parents and masters be what they will, they always wish to have their children and servants good. I think that this admits of few exceptions: consequently the books which come into the hands of young persons, so long as they are under the superintendence of others, will generally be of a kind favourable to virtue—and these are the books which influence the disposition, because this is the time of life when deep and strong impressions are made.

In after life, bad books can always be met by good ones. If we should concede to the adversaries of education the superior activity of those who circulate noxious writings to that of those who wish to diffuse wholesome knowledge, or the avidity and relish with which one sort are received more than the other, the consequence would only be diversity of sentiment; and this is agreeable to experience. When men read and

think, diversity of opinion ensues,—more perhaps than might be desired. Where men neither read nor reason, there is little diversity of opinion at all. Now what I contend for is, that amidst diversity of opinion, though it be an evil, public authority can support and maintain itself. The ascendancy which necessarily belongs to it, added to the reasons which strike every man in favour of order and tranquillity, will usually confer upon it strength sufficient to meet the difficulties which arise from diversity of sentiment. I have said that where the bulk of the common people are kept in profound ignorance, there is seldom much diversity of sentiment amongst them: whilst, therefore, government continues in possession of this sentiment all is well—but how if this sentiment take an opposite direction? how if it set in against the order of things which is established? It then actuates the whole mass, and that mass moves with a force which can hardly be encountered. This is the case of most real danger, and this is a case most likely to arise where the common people are in a state of the greatest ignorance.

It has been alleged as another objection, that any intellectual attainment which others have not, though it were only the being able to read, indisposes the person who is conscious of it for bodily labour, for submission, for the offices which the poor are required to perform. The answer is, that were there any truth in the observation, of which I doubt extremely, it would form an objection, not to the instruction of the poor, but to the imperfectness and partiality with which that instruction is communicated. I should be glad to see the day when every child in the kingdom was taught to read; and then, besides other advantages, there would be an end of the pretence for this objection.

I know not whether the opinion we are considering may not have arisen from the extraordinary events which have taken place in the age in which we live; but I am convinced that these events lead to a conclusion the very opposite of that which is thus drawn from them. The transactions nearest to us and the freshest in our memory, are those of our sister kingdom. And what do they teach us?—If ignorance could have secured the quiet of a country, Ireland had remained at rest: for in no country of Europe were the poor in a state of lower degradation, or under a more complete absence of every species of rational education. The friends of public order in that kingdom bewailed this circumstance, both as the source of the calamities which they endured, and as rendering the evil almost impossible to be remedied. When the people were once deluded, the delusion was incurable: such was their ignorance, that they were not only liable to be practised upon by the grossest impositions, but there was no way of setting them right; no approach could be made, no access could be gained to their understanding; no argument could be addressed to them but at the point of the bayonet. Let the case of Ireland, therefore, stand for ever as a warning against the system of ignorance.

The convulsions in France did not arise from any care that was taken to teach the poor. I believe that in no civilized country, Ireland perhaps excepted, was the education of the poor more neglected. The genius of the religion tended to interdict reading and books to the common people, and the ancient government did not counteract that tendency. We have seen the consequence—a sentiment hostile to the established government spread amongst the people, and that happened, which we have already said will happen under

like circumstances—when they did move, they moved in a mass. Here, therefore, is a second instance against the system of ignorance.

The ignorant system has for ages been the principle of the Turkish government: so much so, as till within a very few years, to forbid the introduction into their dominions of the art of printing. Yet the countries subject to that government have, more than any others with which we are acquainted, been the scenes of insurrection and disturbance. This, therefore, though not properly a modern, is another and a third strong instance against the system of ignorance.

I do not compare our country with foreign nations; but if we may compare one part of the island with another, it is understood, I believe, that there is no part in which reading is so universal as in Scotland; yet I never heard that any danger arose from thence to government, or any loss of public industry in the various branches of manufactures which are carried on in that country.

Reading also is much more general in the northern than the southern parts of the island. Has any inconvenience been from thence perceived, any disadvantage to the state, either political, moral, or commercial?

From instances we pass on to authorities.

The government of Russia, though notoriously a despotic and jealous government, has, in the hands both of its present and late sovereign, applied itself industriously to the erecting of village schools, and to other methods of promoting (at least as far as reading) the education of the very lowest order of its subjects.

The present king of Prussia, as tenacious as his ancestors of the prerogatives of his station, has nevertheless imitated his neighbour, in supplying what he found

and considered as a defect in this respect in the economical institutions of the country, and has formed various regulations and provisions for that purpose.

"The proprietors and planters of estates in the West Indies have, by a resolution of their assembly in several of those islands, lately established a fund for the procuring of clergymen from England, for the purpose of instructing the children of negroes.

The late General Washington, who appears to have bent his mind to the subject of public education with peculiar attention, made provision in his will both for the education of the poor children of his neighbourhood, and the neighbourhood of his estates, and also for the education of the young slaves until the period of their legal manumission should arrive.

These are all so many concessions in favour of the expediency of educating the poor, and carry with them an answer to those who imagine that they see in it danger to the stability of government. The last two instances are particularly strong, because, if education was not deemed to disqualify children for slavery, it cannot be inconsistent with any, even the most servile, station which subsists in a free country.

To conclude: if there be any weight in the reasons, or in the instances, or in the authorities which have been alleged, the inference is, that the new suspicions which have been conceived of education, as it relates to the poor, are unjust, unfounded, neither supported by argument nor verified by experience.

SERMONS

ON PUBLIC OCCASIONS.

I.

CAUTION RECOMMENDED IN THE USE AND APPLICATION OF SCRIPTURE LANGUAGE.

[A Sermon preached July 17, 1777, in the Cathedral Church of Carlisle, at the Visitation of the Right Reverend Lord Bishop of Carlisle.]

2 PET. III. 15, 16.

Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction.

IT must not be dissembled that there are many real difficulties in the Christian Scriptures; whilst, at the same time, more, I believe, and greater, may justly be imputed to certain maxims of interpretation, which have obtained authority without reason, and are received without inquiry. One of these, as I apprehend, is the expecting to find, in the present circumstances of Christianity, a meaning for, or something answering

to, every appellation and expression which occurs in Scripture; or, in other words, the applying to the personal condition of Christians at this day, those titles, phrases, propositions, and arguments, which belong solely to the situation of Christianity at its first institution.

I am aware of an objection which weighs much with many serious tempers, namely, that to suppose any part of Scripture to be inapplicable to us, is to suppose a part of Scripture to be useless; which seems to detract from the perfection we attribute to these oracles of our salvation. To this I can only answer, that it would have been one of the strangest things in the world, if the writings of the New Testament had not, like all other books, been composed for the apprehension, and consequently adapted to the circumstances, of the persons they were addressed to; and that it would have been equally strange, if the great, and in many respects the inevitable alterations, which have taken place in those circumstances, did not vary the application of Scripture language.

I design in the following discourse to propose some examples of this variation, from which you will judge, as I proceed, of the truth and importance of our general observation.

First; at the time the Scriptures were written, none were baptized but converts, and none were converted but from conviction; and conviction produced, for the most part, a corresponding reformation of life and manners. Hence baptism was only another name for conversion, and conversion was supposed to be sincere: in this sense was our Saviour's promise, "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved*;" and in the

* Mark xvi. 16.

same his command to Saint Paul—"Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins*;" this was that baptism "for the remission of sins," to which Saint Peter invited the Jews upon the day of Pentecost†; that "washing of regeneration," by which, as Saint Paul writes to Titus, "he saved us‡." Now, when we come to speak of the baptism which obtains in most Christian churches at present, where no conversion is supposed, or possible, it is manifest, that, if these expressions be applied at all, they must be applied with extreme qualification and reserve.

Secondly; the community of Christians were at first a handful of men connected amongst themselves by the strictest union, and divided from the rest of the world by a real difference of principle and persuasion, and what was more observable, by many outward peculiarities of worship and behaviour. This society, considered collectively, and as a body, were set apart from the rest of mankind for a more gracious dispensation, as well as actually distinguished by a superior purity of life and conversation. In this view, and in opposition to the unbelieving world, they were denominated in Scripture by titles of great seeming dignity and import; they were "elect," "called," "saints§;" they were "in Christ‖;" they were "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people¶." That is, these terms were employed to distinguish the professors of Christianity from the rest of mankind, in the same manner as the names of Greek and Barbarian, Jew and Gentile, distinguished the people of Greece and Israel from other nations. The application of such

* Acts xxii. 16. † Acts ii. 38. ‡ Titus iii. 5.
§ Rom. viii. 33; i. 6, 7. ‖ Rom. viii. 1. ¶ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

phrases to the whole body of Christians is become now obscure; partly because it is not easy to conceive of Christians as a body at all, by reason of the extent of their name and numbers, and the little visible union that subsists among them; and partly, because the heathen world with whom they were compared, and to which comparison these phrases relate, is now ceased, or is removed from our observation. Supposing, therefore, these expressions to have a perpetual meaning, and either forgetting the original use of them, or finding that, at this time, in a great measure exhausted and insignificant, we resort to a sense and an application of them easier, it may be, to our comprehension, but extremely foreign from the design of their authors, namely, to distinguish individuals amongst us, the professors of Christianity from one another: agreeably to which idea the most flattering of these names, the "elect," "called," "saints," have, by bold and unlearned men, been appropriated to themselves and their own party with a presumption and conceit injurious to the reputation of our religion amongst "them that are without," and extremely disgusting to the sober part of its professors; whereas, that such titles were intended in a sense common to all Christian converts, is well argued from many places in which they occur, in which places you may plainly substitute the terms *convert*, or *converted*, for the strongest of these phrases, without any alteration of the author's meaning: *e. g.* "dare any of you go to law before the unjust, and not before the *saints**?" "is any man *called* being circumcised, let him not become uncircumcised†:" "the church that is at Babylon *elected* together with you saluteth you‡:"

* 1 Cor. vi. 1. † 1 Cor. vii. 18. ‡ 1 Pet. v. 13.

"salute Andronicus and Junia, who were *in Christ* before me *."

Thirdly; in opposition to the Jews, who were so much offended by the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, Saint Paul maintains, with great industry, that it was God Almighty's intention, from the first, to substitute at a fit season into the place of the rejected Israelites a society of men taken indifferently out of all nations under heaven, and admitted to be the people of God upon easier and more comprehensive terms: this is expressed in the Epistle to the Ephesians, as follows —"Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself, that, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ†." This scheme of collecting such a society was what God foreknew before the foundation of the world; was what he did predestinate; was the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus; and, by consequence, this society, in their collective capacity, were the objects of this foreknowledge, predestination, and purpose; that is, in the language of the apostles, they were they "whom he did foreknow," they "whom he did predestinate‡;" they were "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world§;" they were "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father‖." This doctrine has nothing in it harsh or obscure. But what have we made of it? The rejection of the Jews, and the adopting another community into their place, composed, whilst it was carrying on, an object of great magnitude in the attention of the inspired writers who

* Rom. xvi. 7. † Eph. i. 9, 10; also see Eph. iii. 5, 6.
‡ Rom. viii. 29. § Eph. i. 4. ‖ 1 Pet. i. 2.

to satisfy these expressions to their full extent, have imagined to themselves certain perceptible impulses of the Holy Ghost, by which, in an instant, and in a manner, no doubt, sufficiently extraordinary, they are "regenerate and born of the Spirit;" they become "new creatures;" they are made the "sons of God," who were before the "children of wrath;" they are "freed from sin," and "from death;" they are chosen, that is, and sealed, without a possibility of fall, unto final salvation. Whilst the patrons of a more sober exposition have been often challenged, and sometimes confounded, with the question—If such expressions of Scripture do not mean this, what do they mean? To which we answer, Nothing: nothing, that is, to us; nothing to be found, or sought for, in the present circumstances of Christianity.

More examples might be produced, in which the unwary use of Scripture language has been the occasion of difficulties and mistakes: but I forbear—the present are sufficient to show, that it behoves every one who undertakes to explain the Scriptures, before he determine to whom or what an expression is now-a-days to be applied, to consider diligently whether it admit of any such application at all; or whether it is not rather to be restrained to the precise circumstances and occasion for which it was originally composed.

I make no apology for addressing this subject to this audience; because whatever relates to the interpretation of Scripture, relates, as I conceive, to us; for if, by any light we may cast upon these ancient books, we can enable and invite the people to read the Bible for themselves, we discharge, in my judgement, the first duty of our functi ing in mind, that we are the ministers r ıe or fancies, but of the sincere gc

II.

ADVICE, ADDRESSED TO THE YOUNG CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF CARLISLE *.

[In a Sermon, preached at a General Ordination, holden at Rose Castle, on Sunday, July 29, 1781.]

1 Timothy iv. 12.

Let no man despise thy youth.

The author of this Epistle, with many better qualities, possessed in a great degree what we at this day call a *knowledge of the world.* He knew, that although age and honours, authority of station and splendour of appearance, usually command the veneration of mankind, unless counteracted by some degrading vice, or egregious impropriety of behaviour; yet, that where these advantages are wanting, where no distinction can be claimed from rank, importance from power, or dignity from years; in such circumstances, and under the inevitable depression of narrow fortunes, to procure and preserve respect requires both care and merit. The Apostle also knew, and in the text taught his beloved convert, that to obtain the respect of those amongst whom he exercised his ministry was an object deserving the ambition of a Christian teacher: not indeed

* It is recommended to those who are preparing for holy orders within the diocese of Carlisle, to read Collier's Sacred Interpreter, and the Four Gospels with Clark's Paraphrase; and to candidates for priest's orders, carefully to peruse Taylor's Paraphrase on the Romans

for his own sake, but for theirs, there being little reason to hope that any would profit by his instruction who despised his person.

If Saint Paul thought an admonition of this sort worthy of a place in his Epistle to Timothy, it cannot surely be deemed either beside or beneath the solemnity of this occasion to deliver a few practicable rules of life and behaviour, which may recommend you to the esteem of the people, to whose service and salvation you are now about to dedicate your lives and labours.

In the first place, the stations which you are likely, for some time at least, to occupy in the church, although not capable of all the means of rendering service and challenging respect, which fall within the power of your superiors, are free from many prejudices that attend upon higher preferments. Interfering interests and disputed rights; or, where there is no place for dispute, the very claim and reception of legal dues, so long as what is received by the minister is taken from the parishioner, form oftentimes an almost insuperable obstruction to the best endeavours that can be used to conciliate the good-will of a neighbourhood. These difficulties perplex not *you*. In whatever contests with his parishioners the *principal* may be engaged, the *curate* has neither dispute nor demand to stand between him and the affections of his congregation.

Another and a still more favourable circumstance in your situation is this; being upon a level with the greatest part of your parishioners, you gain an access to their conversation and confidence, which is rarely granted to the superior clergy, without extraordinary address and the most insinuating advances on their parts. And this is a valuable privilege; for it enables you to inform yourselves of the moral and religious state of your flocks, of their wants and weaknesses,

their habits and opinions, of the vices which prevail, and the principles from which they proceed; in a word, it enables you to study the distemper before you apply the remedy; and not only so, but to apply the remedy in the most commodious form, and with the best effect; by private persuasion and reproof, by gentle and unsuspected conveyances in the intimacy of friendship and opportunities of conversation. To this must be added the many occasions which the living in habits of society with your parishioners affords of reconciling dissensions, healing animosities, administering advice to the young and inexperienced, and consolation to age and misery. I put you in mind of this advantage, because the right use of it constitutes one of the most respectable employments, not only of our order, but of human nature; and leaves you, believe me, little to envy in the condition of your superiors, or to regret in your own. It is true, that this description supposes you to reside so constantly, and to continue so long in the same parish, as to have formed some acquaintance with the persons and characters of your parishioners; and what scheme of doing good in your profession, or even of doing your duty, does not suppose this?

But whilst I recommend a just concern for our reputation, and a proper desire of public esteem, I would by no means flatter that passion for praise and popularity, which seizes oftentimes the minds of young clergymen, especially when their first appearance in their profession has been received with more than common approbation. Unfortunate success! if it incite them to seek fame by affectation and hypocrisy, or lead, as vanity sometimes does, to enthusiasm and extravagance. This is not the taste or character I am holding out to your imitation. The popular preacher courts fame for its own sake, or for what he can make of it;

the sincerely pious minister of Christ modestly invites esteem, only or principally, that it may lend efficacy to his instruction, and weight to his reproofs; the one seeks to be known and proclaimed abroad, the other is content with the silent respect of his neighbourhood, sensible that *that* is the theatre upon which alone his good name can assist him in the discharge of his duty.

It may be necessary likewise to caution you against some awkward endeavours to lift themselves into importance, which young clergymen not unfrequently fall upon; such as a conceited way of speaking, new airs and gestures, affected manners, a mimicry of the fashions, language, and diversions, or even of the follies and vices, of higher life; a hunting after the acquaintance of the great, a cold and distant behaviour towards their former equals, and a contemptuous neglect of their society. Nothing was ever gained by these arts, if they deserve the name of arts, but derision and dislike. Possibly they may not offend against any rule of moral probity; but if they disgust those with whom you are to live, and upon whom the good you do must be done, they defeat not only their own end, but, in a great measure, the very design and use of your vocation.

Having premised these few observations, I proceed to describe the qualities which principally conduce to the end we have at present in view, the possession of a fair and respected character.

And the first virtue (for so I will call it) which appears to me of importance for this purpose is *frugality*. If there be a situation in the world in which profusion is without excuse, it is in that of a young clergyman who has little beside his profession to depend upon for his support. It is folly—it is ruin. Folly, for whether it aim at luxury or show, it must fall miserably

short of its design. In these competitions we are outdone by every rival. The provision which clergymen meet with upon their entrance into the church is adequate in most cases to the wants and decencies of their situation, but to nothing more. To pretend to more, is to set up our poverty not only as the subject of constant observation, but as a laughing-stock to every observer. Profusion is ruin; for it ends, and soon too, in debt, in injustice, and insolvency. You well know how meanly, in the country more especially, every man is thought of who cannot pay his credit; in what terms he is spoken of—in what light he is viewed—what a deduction this is from his good qualities—what an aggravation of his bad ones—what insults he is exposed to from his creditors, what contempt from all. Nor is this judgement far amiss. Let him not speak of honesty, who is daily practising deceit; for every man who is not paid is deceived. Let him not talk of liberality, who puts it out of his power to perform one act of it. Let him not boast of spirit, of honour, of independence who fears the face of his creditors, and who meets a creditor in every street. There is no meanness in frugality: the meanness is in those shifts and expedients to which extravagance is sure to bring men. Profusion is a very equivocal proof of generosity. The proper distinction is not between him who spends and him who saves, for they may be equally selfish; but between him who spends upon himself, and him who spends upon others. When I extol frugality, it is not to praise that minute parsimony which serves for little but to vex ourselves and to tease those about us, but to persuade you to *economy upon a plan*, and that plan deliberately adjusted to your circumstances and ex-

pectations. Set out with it, and it is easy; to retrieve, out of a small income, is only not impossible. Frugality in this sense we preach not only as an article of prudence, but as a lesson of virtue. Of this frugality it has been truly said, that it is the parent of liberty, of independence, of generosity.

A second essential part of a clergyman's character is *sobriety*. In the scale of human vices there may be some more criminal than drunkenness, but none so humiliating. A clergyman cannot, without infinite confusion, produce himself in the pulpit before those who have been witnesses to his intemperance. The folly and extravagance, the rage and ribaldry, the boasts and quarrels, the idiotism and brutality of that condition, will rise up in their imaginations in full colours. To discourse of temperance, to touch in the remotest degree upon the subject, is but to revive his own shame. For you will soon have occasion to observe, that those who are the slowest in taking any part of a sermon to themselves are surprisingly acute in applying it to the preacher.

Another vice, which there is the same, together with many additional reasons for guarding you against, is *dissoluteness*. In my judgement, the crying sin and calamity of this country at present is licentiousness in the intercourse of the sexes. It is a vice which hardly admits of argument or dissuasion. It can only be encountered by the censures of the good, and the discouragement it receives from the most respected orders of the community. What then shall we say, when they who ought to cure the malady propagate the contagion? Upon this subject bear away one observation, that when you suffer yourselves to be engaged in any

unchaste connexion, you not only corrupt an individual by your solicitations, but debauch a whole neighbourhood by the profligacy of your example.

The habit I will next recommend as the foundation of almost all other good ones is retirement. Were I required to comprise my advice to young clergymen in one sentence, it should be in this, Learn to live alone. Half of your faults originate from the want of this faculty. It is impatience of solitude which carries you continually from your parishes, your home, and your duty; makes you foremost in every party of pleasure and place of diversion; dissipates your thoughts, distracts your studies, leads you into expense, keeps you in distress, puts you out of humour with your profession, causes you to place yourselves at the head of some low company, or to fasten yourselves as despicable retainers to the houses and society of the rich. Whatever may be the case with those whose fortunes and opportunities can command a constant succession of company, in situations like ours to be able to pass our time with satisfaction alone and at home is not only a preservative of character, but the very secret of happiness. Do what we will, we must be much and often by ourselves; if this be irksome, the main portions of life will be unhappy. Besides which, we are not the less qualified for society, because we are able to live without it. Our company will be the more welcome for being never obtruded. It is with this as with many pleasures, he meets with it the oftenest, and enjoys it the best, who can most easily put up with the want of it.

But what, you say, shall I do alone? reading is my proper occupation and my pleasure, but books are out of my reach, and beyond my purchase. They who make this complaint are such as seek nothing from

books but amusement, and find amusement from none but works of narrative or imagination. This taste, I allow, cannot be supplied by any moderate expense or ordinary opportunities: but apply yourselves to study; take in hand any branch of useful science, especially those parts of it which are subsidiary to the knowledge of religion, and a few books will suffice; for instance, a commentary upon the New Testament, read so as to be remembered, will employ a great deal of leisure very profitably. There is likewise another resource which you have forgot, I mean the composition of sermons. I am far from refusing you the benefit of other men's labours; I only require that they be called in, not to flatter laziness, but to assist industry. You find yourself unable to furnish a sermon every week; try to compose one every month: depend upon it you will consult your own satisfaction, as well as the edification of your hearers; and that however inferior your compositions may be to those of others in some respects, they will be better delivered, and better received; they will compensate for many defects by a closer application to the ways and manners, the actual thoughts, reasoning, and language, the errors, doubts, prejudices, and vices, the habits, characters, and propensities of your congregation, than can be expected from borrowed discourses—at any rate, you are passing your time virtuously and honourably.

With retirement, I connect reserve; by which I mean, in the first place, some degree of delicacy in the choice of your company, and of refinement in your pleasures. Above all things, keep out of public-houses —you have no business there—your being seen to go in and out of them is disgraceful—your presence in these places entitles every man who meets you there to

affront you by coarse jests, by indecent or opprobrious topics of conversation—neither be seen at drunken feasts, boisterous sports, late hours, nor barbarous diversions—let your amusements, like every thing about you, be still and quiet and unoffending. Carry the same reserve into your correspondence with your superiors. Pursue preferment, if any prospects of it present themselves, not only by honourable means, but with moderate anxiety. It is not essential to happiness, perhaps not very conducive: were it of greater importance than it is, no more successful rule could be given you, than to do your duty quietly and contentedly, and to let things take their course. You may have been brought up with different notions, but be assured, that for once that preferment is forfeited by modesty, it is ten times lost by intrusion and importunity. Every one sympathizes with neglected merit, but who shall lament over repulsed impudence?

The last expedient I shall mention, and, in conjunction with the others, a very efficacious one towards engaging respect, is seriousness in your deportment, especially in discharging the offices of your profession. Salvation is so awful a concern, that no human being, one would think, could be pleased with seeing it, or any thing belonging to it, treated with levity. For a moment, in a certain state of the spirits, men may divert themselves, or affect to be diverted, by sporting with their most sacred interests; but no one in his heart derides religion long—What are we—any of us?—religion soon will be our only care and friend. Seriousness, therefore, in a clergyman is agreeable, not only to the serious, but to men of all tempers and descriptions. And seriousness is enough: a prepossessing appearance, a melodious voice, a graceful delivery, are indeed

enviable accomplishments; but much, we apprehend, may be done without them. The great point is, to be thought *in earnest.* Seem not then to be brought to any part of your duty by constraint, to perform it with reluctance, to go through it in haste, or to quit it with symptoms of delight. In reading the services of the church, provided you manifest a consciousness of the meaning and importance of what you are about, and betray no contempt of your duty, or of your congregation, your manner cannot be too plain and simple. Your common method of speaking, if it be not too low, or too rapid, do not alter, or only so much as to be heard distinctly. I mention this, because your elocution is more apt to offend by straining and stiffness, than on the side of ease and familiarity. The same plainness and simplicity which I recommend in the delivery, prefer also in the style and composition of your sermons. Ornaments, or even accuracy of language, cost the writer much trouble, and produce small advantage to the hearer. Let the character of your sermons be truth and information, and *a decent particularity.* Propose one point in one discourse, and stick to it; a hearer never carries away more than one impression. Disdain not the old fashion of dividing your sermons into heads—in the hands of a master, this may be dispensed with; in yours, a sermon which rejects these helps to perspicuity will turn out a bewildered rhapsody, without aim or effect, order or conclusion. In a word, strive to make your discourses useful, and they who profit by your preaching will soon learn, and long continue, to be pleased with it.

I have now finished the enumeration of those qualities, which are required in the clerical character, and which, wherever they meet, make even youth

venerable, and poverty respected; which will secure esteem under every disadvantage of fortune, person, and situation, and notwithstanding great defects of abilities and attainments. But I must not stop here; a good name, fragrant and precious as it is, is by us only valued in subserviency to our duty, in subordination to a higher reward. If we are more tender of our reputation, if we are more studious of esteem, than others, it is from a persuasion, that by first obtaining the respect of our congregation, and next by availing ourselves of that respect, to promote amongst them peace and virtue, useful knowledge and benevolent dispositions, we are purchasing to ourselves a reversion and inheritance valuable above all price, important beyond every other interest or success.

Go, then, into the vineyard of the Gospel, and may the grace of God go with you! The religion you preach is true. Dispense its ordinances with seriousness, its doctrines with sincerity—urge its precepts, display its hopes, produce its terrors—"be sober, be vigilant"—"have a good report"—confirm the faith of others, testify and adorn your own, by the virtues of your life and the sanctity of your reputation—be peaceable, be courteous; condescending to men of the lowest condition—"apt to teach, willing to communicate;" so far as the immutable laws of truth and probity will permit, "be every thing unto all men, that ye may gain some."

The world will requite you with its esteem. The awakened sinner, the enlightened saint, the young whom you have trained to virtue, the old whom you have visited with the consolations of Christianity, shall pursue you with prevailing blessings and effectual prayers. You will close your lives and ministry with

consciences void of offence, and full of hope.—To present at the last day even one recovered soul, reflect how grateful an offering it will be to *Him*, whose commission was to save a world—infinitely, no doubt, but still only in degree, does our office differ from *His*—himself the first-born; it was the business of his life, the merit of his death, the counsel of his Father's love, the exercise and consummation of his own, "to bring many brethren unto glory."

III.

A DISTINCTION OF ORDERS IN THE CHURCH DEFENDED UPON PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC UTILITY.

[A Sermon preached in the Castle Chapel, Dublin, at the Consecration of John Law, D. D. Lord Bishop of Clonfert and Kilmacduagh, September 21, 1782.]

EPHESIANS IV. 11, 12.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

IN our reasoning and discourses upon the rules and nature of the Christian dispensation, there is no distinction which ought to be preserved with greater care than that which exists between the institution as it addresses the conscience and regulates the duty of particular Christians, and as it regards the discipline and government of the Christian church. It was our Saviour's design, and the first object of his ministry, to afford to a lost and ignorant world such discoveries of their Creator's will, of their own interest, and future destination; such assured principles of faith, and rules of practice; such new motives, terms, and means of obedience; as might enable all, and engage many, to enter upon a course of life, which, by rendering the person who pursued it acceptable to God, would conduct him to happiness, in another stage of his existence.

It was a second intention of the Founder of Christianity, but subservient to the former, to associate those who consented to take upon them the profession of his faith and service into a separate community, for the purpose of united worship and mutual edification, for the better transmission and manifestation of the faith that was delivered to them, but principally to promote the exercise of that fraternal disposition which their new relation to each other, which the visible participation of the same name and hope and calling was calculated to excite.

From a view of these distinct parts of the evangelic dispensation, we are led to place a real difference between the religion of particular Christians and the polity of Christ's church. The one is personal and individual—acknowledges no subjection to human authority—is transacted in the heart—is an account between God and our own consciences alone: the other, appertaining to society (like every thing which relates to the joint interest and requires the co-operation of many persons), is visible and external—prescribes rules of common order, for the observation of which we are responsible not only to God, but to the society of which we are members, or, what is the same thing, to those with whom the public authority of the society is deposited.

But the difference which I am principally concerned to establish consists in this, that whilst the precepts of Christian morality and the fundamental articles of the faith are, for the most part, precise and absolute, are of perpetual, universal, and unalterable obligation; the laws which respect the discipline, instruction, and government of the community, are delivered in terms so general and indefinite as to admit of an application

adapted to the mutable condition and varying exigencies of the Christian church. "As my Father hath sent me, so send I you." "Let every thing be done decently and in order." "Lay hands suddenly on no man." "Let him that ruleth do it with diligence." "The things which thou hast heard of me, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." "For this cause left I thee, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city."

These are all general directions, supposing, indeed, the existence of a regular ministry in the church, but describing no specific order of pre-eminence or distribution of office and authority. If any other instances can be adduced more circumstantial than these, they will be found, like the appointment of the seven deacons, the collections for the saints, the laying by in store upon the first day of the week, to be rules of the society, rather than laws of the religion—recommendations and expedients fitted to the state of the several churches by those who then administered the affairs of them, rather than precepts delivered with a solemn design of fixing a constitution for succeeding ages. The just ends of religious as of civil union are eternally the same; but the means by which these ends may be best promoted and secured will vary with the vicissitudes of time and occasion, will differ according to the local circumstances, the peculiar situation, the improvement, character, or even the prejudices and passions, of the several communities upon whose conduct and edification they are intended to operate.

The apostolic directions which are preserved in the writings of the New Testament seem to exclude no ecclesiastical constitution which the experience and

more instructed judgement of future ages might find it expedient to adopt. And this reserve, if we may so call it, in the legislature of the Christian church, was wisely suited to its primitive condition, compared with its expected progress and extent. The circumstances of Christianity in the early period of its propagation were necessarily very unlike those which would take place when it became the established religion of great nations. The rudiments, indeed, of the future plant were involved within the grain of mustard-seed, but still a different treatment was required for its sustentation when the birds of the air lodged amongst its branches. A small select society under the guidance of inspired teachers, without temporal rights, and without property, founded in the midst of enemies, and living in subjection to unbelieving rulers, divided from the rest of the world by many singularities of conduct and persuasion, and adverse to the idolatry which public authority every where supported, differed so much from the Christian church after Christianity prevailed as the religion of the state; when its economy became gradually interwoven with the civil government of the country; when the purity and propagation of its faith were left to the ordinary expedients of human instruction and an authentic Scripture; when persecution and indigence were to be succeeded by legal security and public provision—clandestine and precarious opportunities of hearing the word and communicating in the rites of Christianity, by stationary pastors and appropriated seasons, as well as places, of religious worship and resort: I say, the situation of the Christian community was so different in the infant and adult state of Christianity, that the highest inconvenience would have followed from establishing a precise constitution which was to be

obligatory upon both: the same disposition of affairs which was most commodious and conducive to edification in the one becoming probably impracticable under the circumstances, or altogether inadequate to the wants, of the other.

What farther recommends the forbearance observable in this part of the Christian institution is the consideration, that as Christianity solicited admission into every country in the world, it cautiously refrained from interfering with the municipal regulations or civil condition of any. Negligent of every view, but what related to the deliverance of mankind from spiritual perdition, the Saviour of the world advanced no pretensions which, by disturbing the arrangements of human polity, might present an obstacle to the reception of his faith. We may ascribe it to this design, that he left the laws of his church so open and indeterminate, that whilst the ends of religious communion were sufficiently declared, the form of the society might be assimilated to the civil constitution of each country, to which it should always communicate strength and support in return for the protection it received. If there be any truth in these observations, they lead to this temperate and charitable conclusion; "that Christianity may be professed under any form of church government."

But though all things are lawful, all things are not expedient. If we concede to other churches the Christian legality of their constitution, so long as Christian worship and instruction are competently provided for, we may be allowed to maintain the advantage of our own, upon principles which all parties acknowledge—considerations of public utility. We may be allowed to contend, that whilst we imitate, so far as a great disparity of circumstances permits, the example, and what

we apprehend to be the order, of the apostolic age, our church and ministry are inferior to none in the great object of their institution, their suitableness to promote and uphold the profession, knowledge, and influence of pure Christianity. The separation of a particular order of men for the work of the ministry—the reserving to these exclusively the conduct of public worship and the preaching of the word—the distribution of the country into districts, and the assigning of each district to the care and charge of its proper pastor—lastly, the appointment to the clergy of a maintenance independent of the caprice of their congregation, are measures of ecclesiastical policy which have been adopted by every national establishment of Christianity in the world. Concerning these points there exists no controversy. The chief article of regulation upon which the judgement of some Protestant churches dissents from ours is, that whilst they have established a perfect parity among their clergy, we prefer a distinction of orders in the church, not only as recommended by the usage of the purest times, but as better calculated to promote, what all churches must desire, the credit and efficacy of the sacerdotal office.

The force and truth of this last consideration I will endeavour to evince.

First; the body of the clergy, in common with every regular society, must necessarily contain some internal provision for the government and correction of its members. Where a distinction of orders is not acknowledged, this government can only be administered by synods and assemblies, because the supposition of equality forbids the delegation of authority to single persons. Now, although it may be requisite to consult and collect the opinions of a community, in the mo-

mentous deliberations which ought to precede the establishment of those public laws by which it is to be bound; yet in every society the execution of these laws, the current and ordinary affairs of its government, are better managed by fewer hands. To commit personal questions to public debate, to refer every case and character which requires animadversion to the suffrages and examination of a numerous assembly, what is it, but to feed and perpetuate contention, to supply materials for endless altercation, and opportunities for the indulgence of concealed enmity and private prejudices? The complaint of ages testifies, with how much inflammation, and how little equity, ecclesiastical conventions have conducted their proceedings; how apt intrigue has ever been to pervert inquiry, and clamour to confound discussion. Whatever may be the other benefits of equality, peace is best secured by subordination. And if this be a consideration of moment in every society, it is of peculiar importance to the clergy. Preachers of peace, ministers of charity and of reconciliation to the world, that constitution surely ill befits their office and character which has a tendency to engage them in contests and disputes with one another.

Secondly; the appointment of various orders in the church may be considered as the stationing of ministers of religion in the various ranks of civil life. The distinctions of the clergy ought, in some measure, to correspond with the distinctions of lay-society, in order to supply each class of the people with a clergy of their own level and description, with whom they may live and associate upon terms of equality. This reason is not imaginary nor insignificant. The usefulness of a virtuous and well-informed clergy consists neither

wholly nor principally in their public preaching, or the stated functions of their order. It is from the example and in the society of such persons that the requisites which prepare the mind for the reception of virtue and knowledge, a taste for serious reflection and discourse, habits of thought and reasoning, a veneration for the laws and awful truths of Christianity, a disposition to inquire, and a solicitude to learn, are best gained: at least, the decency of deportment, the sobriety of manners and conversation, the learning, the gravity, which usually accompany the clerical character, insensibly diffuse their influence over every company into which they are admitted. Is it of no importance to provide friends and companions of this character for the superior as well as for the middle orders of the community? Is it flattery to say, that the manners and society of higher life would suffer some depravation from the loss of so many men of liberal habits and education, as at present, by occupying elevated stations in the church, are entitled to be received into its number? This intercourse would cease, if the clergy were reduced to a level with one another, and, of consequence, with the inferior part of the community. These distinctions, whilst they prevail, must be complied with. How much soever the moralist may despise, or the divine overlook, the discriminations of rank, which the rules or prejudices of modern life have introduced into society; when we have the world to instruct and to deal with, we must take and treat it as it is, not as the wishes or the speculations of philosophy would represent it to our view. When we describe the public as peculiarly interested in every thing which affects, though but remotely, the character of the great and powerful, it is not that the soul of the

rich man is more precious than that of the poor, but because his virtues and his vices have a more considerable and extensive effect.

Thirdly; they who behold the privileges and emoluments of the superior clergy with the most unfriendly inclination profess nevertheless to wish, that the order itself should be respected; but how is this respect to be procured? It is equally impossible to invest every clergyman with the decorations of affluence and rank, and to maintain the credit and reputation of an order which is altogether destitute of these distinctions. Individuals, by the singularity of their virtue or their talents, may surmount all disadvantages; but the order will be contemned. At present, every member of our ecclesiastical establishment communicates with the dignity which is conferred upon a few—every clergyman shares in the respect which is paid to his superiors—the ministry is honoured in the persons of prelates. Nor is this economy peculiar to our order. The professions of arms and of the law derive their lustre and esteem, not merely from their utility (which is a reason only to the few), but from the exalted place in the scale of civil life which hath been wisely assigned to those who fill stations of power and eminence in these great departments. And if this disposition of honours be approved in other kinds of public employment, why should not the credit and liberality of ours be upheld by the same expedient?

Fourthly; rich and splendid situations in the church have been justly regarded as prizes held out to invite persons of good hopes and ingenious attainments to enter into its service. The value of the prospect may be the same, but the allurement is much greater, where opulent shares are reserved to reward the success of a

few, than where, by a more equal partition of the fund, all indeed are competently provided for, but no one can raise even his hopes beyond a penurious mediocrity of subsistence and situation. It is certainly of consequence that young men of promising abilities be encouraged to engage in the ministry of the church; otherwise our profession will be composed of the refuse of every other. None will be found content to stake the fortune of their lives in this calling, but they whom slow parts, personal defects, or a depressed condition of birth and education, preclude from advancement in any other. The vocation in time comes to be thought mean and discreditable—study languishes—sacred erudition declines—not only the order is disgraced, but religion itself disparaged in such hands. Some of the most judicious and moderate of the Presbyterian clergy have been known to lament this defect in their constitution. They see and deplore the backwardness in youth of active and well-cultivated faculties to enter into their church, and their frequent resolutions to quit it. Again, if a gradation of orders be necessary to invite candidates into the profession, it is still more so to excite diligence and emulation; to promote an attention to character and public opinion when they are in it; especially to guard against that sloth and negligence into which men are apt to fall, who arrive too soon at the limits of their expectations. We will not say, that the race is always to the swift, or the prize to the deserving; but we have never known that age of the church in which the advantage was not on the side of learning and decency.

These reasons appear to me to be well founded, and they have this in their favour, that they do not suppose too much; they suppose not any impracticable precision

in the reward of merit, or any greater degree of disinterestedness, circumspection, and propriety in the bestowing of ecclesiastical preferment, than what actually takes place. They are, however, much strengthened, and our ecclesiastical constitution defended with yet greater success, when men of conspicuous and acknowledged merit are called to its superior stations: "when it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth." When pious labours and exemplary virtue, when distinguished learning, or eminent utility, when long or arduous services are repaid with affluence and dignity, when a life of severe and well-directed application to the studies of religion, when wasted spirits and declining health are suffered to repose in honourable leisure, the good and wise applaud a constitution which has provided such things for such men.

Finally; let us reflect that these, after all, are but secondary objects. Christ came not to found an empire upon earth, or to invest his church with temporal immunities. He came "to seek and to save that which was lost;" to purify to himself from amidst the pollutions of a corrupt world "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." As far as our establishment conduces to forward and facilitate these ends, so far we are sure it falls in with his design, and is sanctified by his authority. And whilst they who are intrusted with its government employ their cares, and the influence of their stations, in judicious and unremitting endeavours to enlarge the dominion of virtue and of Christianity over the hearts and affections of mankind; whilst "by pureness, by knowledge," by the aids of learning, by the piety of their example, they labour to inform the consciences and improve the morals of the people committed to their charge, they secure to themselves, and to the church in

which they preside, peace and permanency, reverence and support. What is infinitely more, they "save their own souls;" they prepare for the approach of that tremendous day, when Jesus Christ shall return again to the world and to his church, at once the gracious rewarder of the toils, and patience, and fidelity of his servants, and the strict avenger of abused power and neglected duty.

IV.

DANGERS INCIDENTAL TO THE CLERICAL CHARACTER STATED.

[In a Sermon preached before the University of Cambridge, at Great St. Mary's Church, on Sunday, July 5, being Commencement Sunday.]

1 CORINTHIANS, IX.—PART OF THE 27TH VERSE.

Lest that, by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.

THESE words discover the anxiety, not to say the fears, of the writer, concerning the event of his personal salvation: and, when interpreted by the words which precede them, strictly connect that event with the purity of his personal character.

It is extremely material to remember who it was that felt this deep solicitude for the fate of his spiritual interests, and the persuasion that his acceptance (in so far as it is procured by human endeavours) would depend upon the care and exactness with which he regulated his own passions, and his own conduct: because, if a man ever existed, who, in the zeal and labour with which he served the cause of religion, in the ardour or the efficacy of his preaching, in his sufferings or his success, might hope for some excuse to indulgence, some licence for gratifications which were forbidden to others, it was the author of the text which has been now read to you. Yet the Apostle appears

to have known, and by his knowledge teaches us, that no exertion of industry, no display of talents, no public merit, however great, or however good or sacred be the cause in which it is acquired, will compensate for the neglect of personal self-government.

This, in my opinion, is an important lesson to all: to none, certainly, can it be more applicable, than it is in every age to the teachers of religion; for a little observation of the world must have informed us, that the human mind is prone, almost beyond resistance, to sink the weakness or the irregularities of private character in the view of public services; that this propensity is the strongest in a man's own case; that it prevails more powerfully in religion than in other subjects, inasmuch as the teachers of religion consider themselves (and rightly do so) as ministering to the higher interests of human existence.

Still farther, if there be causes, as I believe there are, which raise extraordinary difficulties in the way of those who are engaged in the offices of religion; circumstances even of disadvantage in the profession and character, as far as relates to the conservation of their own virtue; it behoves them to adopt the Apostle's caution with more than common care, because it is only to prepare themselves for dangers to which they are more than commonly exposed.

Nor is there good reason for concealing, either from ourselves or others, any unfavourable dispositions which the nature of our employment or situation may tend to generate: for, be they what they will, they only prove, that it happens to us according to the condition of human life—with many benefits to receive some inconveniences—with many helps to experience some trials: that, with many peculiar motives to virtue, and means

of improvement in it, some obstacles are presented to our progress which it may require a distinct and positive effort of the mind to surmount.

I apprehend that I am stating a cause of no inconsiderable importance, when amongst these impediments I mention, in the first place, the insensibility to religious impression, which a constant conversation with religious subjects, and, still more, a constant intermixture with religious offices, is wont to induce. Such is the frame of the human constitution (and calculated also for the wisest purposes), that whilst all active habits are facilitated and strengthened by repetition, impressions under which we are passive are weakened and diminished. Upon the first of these properties depends, in a great measure, the exercise of the arts of life: upon the second, the capacity which the mind possesses of adapting itself to almost every situation. This quality is perceived in numerous, and for the most part, beneficial examples. Scenes of terror, spectacles of pain, objects of loathing and disgust, so far lose their effect with their novelty, as to permit professions to be carried on, and conditions of life to be endured, which otherwise, although necessary, would be insupportable. It is a quality, however, which acts, as other parts of our frame do, by an operation which is general: hence it acts also in instances in which its influence is to be corrected; and, amongst these, in religion. Every attentive Christian will have observed how much more powerfully he is affected by any form of worship which is uncommon than with the familiar returns of his own religious offices. He will be sensible of the difference, when he approaches, a few times in the year, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper; if he should be present at the visitation of the sick; or even, if that were unusual

to him, at the sight of a family assembled in prayer. He will perceive it also upon entering the doors of a dissenting congregation: a circumstance which has misled many, by causing them to ascribe to some advantage in the conduct of public worship what, in truth, is only the effect of new impressions. Now, by how much a lay frequenter of religious worship finds himself less warmed and stimulated by ordinary than by extraordinary acts of devotion, by so much, it may be expected, that a clergyman, habitually conversant with the offices of religion, will be less moved and stimulated than he is. What then is to be done? It is by an effort of reflection, by a positive exertion of the mind, by knowing this tendency, and by setting ourselves expressly to resist it, that we are to repair the decays of spontaneous piety. We are no more to surrender ourselves to the mechanism of our frame than to the impulse of our passions. We are to assist our sensitive by our rational nature. We are to supply this infirmity (for so it may be called, although, like many other properties which bear the name of vices in our constitution, it be, in truth, a beneficial principle acting according to a general law)—we are to supply it by a deeper sense of the obligations under which we lie; by a more frequent and a more distinct recollection of the reasons upon which that obligation is founded. We are not to wonder at the pains which this may cost us; still less are we to imitate the despondency of some serious Christians, who, in the impaired sensibility that habit hath induced, bewail the coldness of a deserted soul.

Hitherto our observation will not be questioned: but I think that this principle goes farther than is generally known or acknowledged. I think that it

extends to the influence which argument itself possesses upon our understanding; or, at least, to the influence which it possesses in determining our will. I will not say, that, in a subject strictly intellectual, and in science properly so called, a demonstration is the less convincing for being old: but I am not sure that this is not, in some measure, true of moral evidence, and probable proofs. In practical subjects, however, where two things are to be done, the understanding to be convinced, and the will to be persuaded, I believe that the force of every argument is diminished by triteness and familiarity. The intrinsic value of the argument must be the same: the impression may be very different.

But *we* have a disadvantage to contend with additional to this. The consequence of repetition will be felt more sensibly by us, who are in the habit of directing our arguments to others: for it always requires a second, a separate, and an unusual effort of the mind, to bring back the conclusion upon ourselves. In constructing, in expressing, in delivering our arguments; in all the thoughts and study which we employ upon them; what we are apt to hold continually in our view is the effect which they may produce upon those who hear or read them. The further and best use of our meditations, their influence upon our own hearts and consciences, is lost in the presence of the other. In philosophy itself, it is not always the same thing, to study a subject, in order to understand, and in order only to teach it. In morals and religion, the powers of persuasion are cultivated by those whose employment is public instruction; but their wishes are fulfilled, and their care exhausted, in promoting the success of their endeavours upon others. The secret duty of turning truly and in earnest their attention upon themselves

is suspended, not to say forgotten, amidst the labours, the engagements, the popularity, of their public ministry; and, in the best-disposed minds, is interrupted, by the anxiety, or even by the satisfaction, with which their public services are performed.

These are dangers adhering to the very nature of our profession: but the evil is often also augmented by our imprudence. In our wishes to convince, we are extremely apt to *overstate* our arguments. We think no confidence with which we speak of them can be too great, when our intention is to urge them upon our hearers. This zeal, not seldom I believe, defeats its own purpose, even with those whom we address; but it always destroys the efficacy of the argument upon ourselves. We are conscious of the exaggeration, whether our hearers perceive it or not; and this consciousness corrupts to us the whole influence of the conclusion; robs it even of its just value. Demonstration admits of no degrees; but real life knows nothing of demonstration. It converses only with moral evidence and moral reasoning. In these the scale of probability is extensive; and every argument hath its place in it. It may not be quite the same thing to overstate a true reason, and to advance a false one: but since two questions present themselves to the judgement, usually joined together by their nature and importance, viz. on which side probability lies, and how much it preponderates; to transgress the rules of fair reasoning in either question, in either to go beyond our own perception of the subject, is a similar, if not an equal fault. In both cases it is a want of candour, which approaches to a want of veracity. But that, in which its worst effect is seen—that, at least, which it belongs to this discourse to notice—is in its so undermining the so-

lidity of our proofs, that our own understandings refuse to rest upon them; in vitiating the integrity of our own judgements; in rendering our minds, as well incapable of estimating the proper strength of moral and religious arguments, as unreasonably suspicious of their truth, and dull and insensible to their impression.

If dangers to our character accompany the exercise of our public ministry, they no less attend upon the nature of our professional studies. It has been said, that literary trifling upon the Scriptures has a tendency, above all other employments, to harden the heart. If by this maxim it be designed to reprove the exercise, to check the freedom, or to question the utility, of critical researches, when employed upon the sacred volume, it is not by me to be defended. If it mean simply to guard against an existing danger, to state a usual and natural consequence, the maxim wants neither truth nor use. It is founded in this observation: when any one, by the command of learning and talents, has been fortunate enough to clear up an obscurity, or to settle a doubt, in the interpretation of Scripture; pleased (and justly pleased) with the result of his endeavours, his thoughts are wont to indulge this complacency, and there to stop: or when another, by a patient application of inferior faculties, has made, as he thinks, some progress in theological studies; or even has with much attention engaged in them; he is apt to rest and stay in what he deems a religious and meritorious service. The critic and the commentator do not always proceed with the reflection, that if these things be true, if this book do indeed convey to us the will of God, then is it no longer to be studied and criticised alone, but, what is a very different work, to be obeyed, and to be acted upon. At least, this ulte-

rior operation of the mind, enfeebled perhaps by former exertions of quite another nature, does not always retain sufficient force and vigour to bend the obstinacy of the will. To describe the evil is to point out the remedy; which must consist in holding stedfastly within our view this momentous consideration, that, however laboriously, or however successfully, we may have cultivated religious studies; how much soever we may have added to our learning or our fame, we have hitherto done little for our salvation; that a more arduous, to us perhaps a new, and, it may be, a painful work, which the public eye sees not, which no public favour will reward, yet remains to be attempted—that of instituting an examination of our hearts and of our conduct, of altering the secret course of our behaviour, of reducing, with whatever violence to our habits, loss of our pleasures, or interruption of our pursuits, its deviations to a conformity with those rules of life which are delivered in the volume that lies open before us; and which, if it be of importance enough to deserve our study, ought, for reasons infinitely superior, to command our obedience.

Another disadvantage incidental to the character of which we are now exposing the dangers, is the moral debility that arises from the want of being trained in the virtues of active life. This complaint belongs not to the clergy as such, because their pastoral office affords as many calls, and as many opportunities, for beneficent exertions, as are usually found in private stations; but it belongs to that secluded, contemplative life, which men of learning often make choice of, or into which they are thrown by the accident of their fortunes. A great part of mankind owe their principles to their practice; that is, to that wonderful accession

of strength and energy which good dispositions receive from good actions. It is difficult to sustain virtue by meditation alone; but let our conclusions only have influence enough once to determine us upon a course of virtue, and that influence will acquire such augmentation of force from every instance of virtuous endeavour, as, ere long, to produce in us constancy and resolution, a formed and a fixed character. Of this great and progressive assistance to their principles, men who are withdrawn from the business and the intercourse of civil life find themselves in some measure deprived. Virtue in them is left, more than in others, to the dictates of reason; to a sense of duty less aided by the power of habit. I will not deny that this difference renders their virtue more pure, more actual, and nearer to its principle; but it renders it less easy to be attained or preserved.

Having proposed these circumstances, as difficulties of which I think it useful that our order should be apprised; and as growing out of the functions of the profession, its studies, or the situations in which it places us; I proceed, with the same view, to notice a turn and habit of thinking, which is, of late, become very general amongst the higher classes of the community, amongst all who occupy stations of authority, and in common with these two descriptions of men, amongst the clergy. That which I am about to animadvert upon is, in its place, and to a certain degree, undoubtedly a fair and right consideration; but, in the extent to which it prevails, has a tendency to discharge from the hearts of mankind all religious principle whatever. What I mean is the performing of our religious offices for the sake of *setting an example* to others; and the allowing of this motive so to take pos-

session of the mind as to substitute itself into the place of the proper ground and reason of the duty. I must be permitted to contend, that, whenever this is the case, it becomes not only a cold and extraneous, but a false and unreasonable, principle of action. A conduct propagated through the different ranks of society merely by this motive, is a chain without a support, a fabric without a foundation. The parts, indeed, depend upon one another, but there is nothing to bear up the whole. There must be some reason for every duty beside example, or there can be no sufficient reason for it at all. It is a perversion, therefore, of the regular order of our ideas, to suffer a consideration, which, whatever be its importance, is only secondary and consequential to another, to shut out that other from the thoughts. The effect of this in the offices of religion is utterly to destroy their religious quality; to rob them of that which gives to them their life, their spirituality, their nature. They who would set an example to others of acts of worship and devotion, in truth perform none themselves. Idle or proud spectators of the scene, they vouchsafe their presence in our assemblies, for the edification, it seems, and benefit of others, but as if they had no sins of their own to deplore, no mercies to acknowledge, no pardon to entreat.

Shall the consideration, then, of example be prohibited and discarded from the thoughts? By no means: but let it attend upon, not supersede, the proper motive of the action. Let us learn to know and feel the reason, the value, and the obligation of the duty, as it concerns ourselves; and, in proportion as we are affected by the force of these considerations, we shall desire, and desiring endeavour, to extend their influence to others. This wish, flowing from an original

sense of each duty, preserves to the duty its proper principle. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." *The glory of your heavenly Father* is still, you observe, the termination of the precept. The love of God; that zeal for his honour and service, which love, which gratitude, which piety inspires, are still to be the operating motive of your conduct. Because we find it convenient to ourselves, that those about us should be religious; or because it is useful to the state, that religion should be upheld in the country: to join, from these motives, in the public ordinances of the church, for the sake of maintaining their credit by our presence and example, however advisable it may be as a branch of secular prudence, is not either to fulfil our Lord's precept, or to perform any religious service. Religion can spring only from its own principle. Believing our salvation to be involved in the faithful discharge of our religious as well as moral duties, or rather that they are the same; experiencing the warmth, the consolation, the virtuous energy, which every act of true devotion communicates to the heart, and how much these effects are heightened by consent and sympathy; with the benevolence with which we love our neighbour, loving also and seeking his immortal welfare; when, prompted by these sentiments, we unite with him in acts of social homage to our Maker, then hath every principle its weight; then, at length, is our worship what it ought to be; exemplary, yet our own; not the less personal for being public. We bring our hearts to the service, and not a constrained attendance upon the place, with oftentimes an ill-concealed indifference to what is there passing.

If what we have stated concerning example be true; if the consideration of it be liable to be overstretched or misapplied; no persons can be more in danger of falling into the mistake than they who are taught to regard themselves as placed in their stations for the purpose of becoming the examples as well as instructors of their flocks. It is necessary that they should be admonished to revert continually to the fundamental cause of all obligation and of all duty; particularly to remember that, in their religious offices, they have not only to pronounce, to excite, to conduct the devotion of their congregations, but to pay to God the adoration which themselves owe to him: in a word, amidst their care of others, to save their own souls by their own religion.

These, I think, are some of the causes, which, in the conduct of their lives, call for a peculiar attention from the clergy, and from men of learning; and which render the Apostle's example, and the lesson which it teaches, peculiarly applicable to their circumstances. It remains only to remind them of a consideration which ought to counteract these disadvantages, by producing a care and solicitude sufficient to meet every danger, and every difficulty: to remind them, I say, for they cannot need to be informed, of our Lord's solemn declaration, that contumacious knowledge and neglected talents, knowledge which doth not lead to obedience, and talents which rest in useless speculations, will be found, in the day of final account, amongst the objects of his severest displeasure. Would to God, that men of learning always understood how deeply they are concerned in this warning! It is impossible to add another reason which can be equal or second to

our Lord's admonition: but we may suggest a motive, of very distant, indeed, but of no mean importance, and to which they certainly will not refuse a due regard, the honour and estimation of learning itself. Irregular morals in men of distinguished attainments render them, not despised (for talents and learning never can be despicable), but subjects of malicious remark, perhaps of affected pity, to the enemies of intellectual liberty, of science and literature; and, at the same time, of sincere though silent regret to those who are desirous of supporting the esteem which ought to await the successful pursuit of ingenious studies. We entreat such men to reflect, that their conduct will be made the reply of idleness to industry, the revenge of dulness and ignorance upon parts and learning; to consider, how many will seek, and think they find, in their example, an apology for sloth, and for indifference to all liberal improvement; what a theme, lastly, they supply to those, who, to the discouragement of every mental exertion, preach up the vanity of human knowledge, and the danger or the mischief of superior attainments!

But if the reputation of learning be concerned in the conduct of those who devote themselves to its pursuit, the sacred interests of morality are not less so. It is for us to take care that we justify not the boasts, or the sneers, of infidelity; that we do not authorise the worst of all scepticism, that which would subvert the distinctions of moral good and evil, by insinuating concerning them, that their only support is prejudice, their only origin in the artifice of the wise, and the credulity of the multitude; and that these things are but too clearly confessed by the lives of men of learning and inquiry. This calumny let us contradict—let

us refute. Let us show, that virtue and Christianity cast their deepest foundations in knowledge; that, however they may ask the aid of principles which, in a great degree, govern human life (and which must necessarily, therefore, be either powerful allies, or irresistible adversaries), of education, of habit, of example, of public authority, of public institutions, they rest, nevertheless, upon the firm basis of rational argument. Let us testify to the world our sense of this great truth, by the only evidence which the world will believe, the influence of our conclusions upon our own conduct.

V.

[A Sermon, preached at the Assizes, at Durham, July 29, 1795; and published at the request of the Lord Bishop, the honourable the Judges of Assize, and the Grand Jury.]

ROMANS XIV. 7.

For none of us liveth to himself.

THE use of many of the precepts and maxims of Scripture is not so much to prescribe actions, as to generate some certain turn and habit of thinking: and they are then only applied as they ought to be, when they furnish us with such a view of, and such a way of considering, the subject to which they relate, as may rectify and meliorate our dispositions; for from dispositions so rectified and meliorated, particular good actions, and particular good rules of acting, flow of their own accord. This is true of the great Christian maxims, of loving our neighbours as ourselves; of doing to others as we would that others should do to us; and (as will appear, I hope, in the sequel of this discourse) of that of the text. These maxims being well impressed, the detail of conduct may be left to itself. The subtleties of casuistry, I had almost said the science, may be spared. By presenting to the mind one fixed consideration, such a temper is at length formed within us, that our first impressions and first impulses are sure almost of being on the side of

virtue; aud that we feel likewise an almost irresistible inclination to be governed by them. When this disposition is perfected, the influence of religion, as a moral institution, is sufficiently established.

It is not in this way, but in another, that human laws, especially the laws of free countries, proceed to attain their objects. Forasmuch as their ultimate sanctions are to be dispensed by fallible men, instead of an unerring and omniscient Judge, the safety, as well as the liberty, of the subject, requires that discretion should be bound down by precise rules, both of acting and of judging of actions. Hence lawgivers have been obliged to multiply directions and prohibitions without number: and this necessity, for such I acknowledge it to be, hath drawn them into a prolixity, which encumbers the law as a science to those who study or administer it; and sometimes perplexes it, as a rule of conduct, to those who have nothing to do with it but to obey it. Yet still they find themselves unable to make laws as fast as occasions demand them: they find themselves perpetually called upon to pursue, by fresh paths, the inventive versatility of human fraud, or to provide for new and unforeseen varieties of situation. Now should religion, which professes to guide the whole train and range of a man's conduct, internal as well as external, domestic as well as civil, and which, consequently, extends the operations of its rules to many things which the laws leave indifferent and uncontrolled; should religion, I say, once set about to imitate the precision of human laws, the volume of its precepts would soon be rendered useless by its bulk, and unintelligible by its intricacy. The religion of Mahomet, as might be expected from the religion of a military prophet, constituted itself into the law of

the states into which it was received. Assuming the functions of legislators and magistrates, in conjunction with the character of interpreters of the Koran, and depositaries of the supplemental laws of the religion, the successors of the Arabian have, under the name of traditionary rules, compiled a code for the direction of their followers in almost every part of their conduct. The *seventy-five thousand* precepts of that code* serve only to show the futility of the attempt; to prove by experiment, that religion can only act upon human life by general precepts, addressed and applied to the disposition; that there is no ground for the objection that has sometimes been made to Christianity, that it is defective, as a moral institution, for the want of more explicit, more circumstantial, and more accurate directions; and that when we place by the side of each other human and divine laws, without understanding the distinction in the two methods by which they seek to attain their purpose, and the reason of that distinction, we form a comparison between them which is likely to be injurious to both. We may find fault with the Scriptures, for not giving us the precision of civil laws; and we may blame the laws, for not being content with the conciseness and simplicity of Scripture; and our censure in both cases be unfounded and undeserved.

The observation of the text is exactly of the nature I have been alluding to. It supplies a principle. It furnishes us with a view of our duty, and of the relations in which we are placed, which, if attended to (and no instruction can be of use without that), will produce in our minds just determinations, and, what are of more value, because more wanted, efficacious motives.

* See Hamilton's translation of the Hedaya or Guide.

"None of us liveth to himself." We ought to regard our lives (including under that name our faculties, our opportunities, our advantages of every kind), not as mere instruments of personal gratification, but as due to the service of God; and as given us to be employed in promoting the purpose of his will in the happiness of our fellow-creatures. I am not able to imagine a turn of thought which is better than this. It encounters the antagonist, the check, the destroyer of all virtue, selfishness. It is intelligible to all; to all in different degrees applicable. It incessantly prompts to exertion, to activity, to beneficence.

In order to recommend it, and in order to render it as useful as it is capable of being made, it may be proper to point out how the force and truth of the apostle's assertion bears upon the different classes of civil society. And in this view, the description of men which first, undoubtedly, offers itself to our notice, is that of men of public characters—who possess offices of importance, power, influence, and authority. If the rule and principle which I am exhibiting to your observation can be said to be made for one class of mankind more than another, it is for them. *They*, certainly, "live not to themselves." The design, the tenure, the condition of their offices; the public expectation, the public claim, consign their lives and labours, their cares and thoughts and talents, to the public happiness, whereinsoever it is connected with the duties of their stations, or can be advanced by the fidelity of their services. There may be occasions and emergencies when men are called upon to take part in the public service, out of the line of their professions, or the ordinary limits of their vocation. But these emergencies occur, I think, seldom. The necessity should be manifest, before we yield to

it. A too great readiness to start out of our separate precincts of duty, in order to rush into provinces which belong to others, is a dangerous excess of zeal. In general the public interest is best upheld, the public quiet always best preserved, by each one attending closely to the proper and distinct duties of his station. In seasons of peril or consternation, this attention ought to be doubled. Dangers are not best opposed by tumultuous or disorderly exertions, but by a sedate, firm, and calm resistance: especially by that regular and silent strength, which is the collected result of each man's vigilance and industry in his separate station. For public men, therefore, to be active in the stations assigned to them, is demanded by their country in the hour of her fear or danger. If ever there was a time when they that rule "should rule with diligence;" when supineness, negligence, and remissness in office, when a timidity or love of ease, which might in other circumstances be tolerated, ought to be proscribed and excluded, it is the present. If ever there was a time to make the public feel the benefit of public institutions, it is this.

But I shall add nothing more concerning the obligation which the text, and the lesson it conveys, imposes upon public men, because I think the principle is too apt to be considered as appertaining to them alone. It will therefore be more useful to show how what are called private stations are affected by the same principle. I say, what are called private stations; for such they are, only as contradistinguished from public trusts publicly and formally confided. In themselves, and accurately estimated, there are few such; I mean, that there are few so destined to the private emolument of the possessor, as that they are innocently occupied

by him, when they are occupied with no other attention but to his own enjoyment. Civil government is constituted for the happiness of the governed, and not for the gratification of those who administer it. Not only so, but the gradations of rank in society are supported, not for the advantage or pleasure of those who possess the highest places in it, but for the common good; for the security, the repose, the protection, the encouragement, of all. They may be very satisfactorily defended upon this principle; but then this principle casts upon them duties. In particular it teaches every man who possesses a fortune to regard himself as in some measure occupying a public station; as obliged to make it a channel of beneficence, an instrument of good to others, and not merely a supply to himself of the materials of luxury, ostentation, or avarice. There is a share of power and influence necessarily attendant upon property; upon the right or the wrong use of which, the exertion or the neglect, depends no little part of the virtue or vice, the happiness or misery, of the community. It is in the choice of every man of rank and property to become the benefactor or the scourge, the guardian or the tyrant, the example or the corrupter, of the virtue of his servants, his tenants, his neighbourhood; to be the author to them of peace or contention, of sobriety or dissoluteness, of comfort or distress. This power, whencesoever it proceeds, whether expressly conferred or silently acquired (for I see no difference in the two cases), brings along with it obligation and responsibility. It is to be lamented when this consideration is not known, or not attended to. Two causes appear to me to obstruct, to men of this description, the view of their moral situation. One is, that they do not perceive any *call* upon them at all;

the other, that, if there be one, they do not see to what they are called. To the first point I would answer in the words of an excellent moralist *, "The delivery of the talent is the call;" it is the call of Providence, the call of Heaven. The supply of the means is the requisition of the duty. When we find ourselves in possession of faculties and opportunities, whether arising from the endowments and qualities of our minds, or from the advantages of fortune and station, we need ask for no further evidence of the intention of the Donor: we ought to see in that intention a demand upon us for the use and application of what has been given. This is a principle of natural as well as revealed religion; and it is universal. Then as to the second inquiry, the species of benevolence, the kind of duty to which we are bound, it is pointed out to us by the same indication. To whatever office of benevolence our faculties are best fitted, our talents turned; whatever our opportunities, our occasions, our fortune, our profession, our rank or station, or whatever our local circumstances, which are capable of no enumeration, put in our power to perform with the most advantage and effect, that is the office for us; that it is, which, upon our principle, we are designed, and, being designed, are obliged to discharge. I think that the judgement of mankind does not often fail them in the choice of the objects or species of their benevolence: but what fails them is the sense of the obligation, the consciousness of the connexion between duty and power, and springing from this consciousness a disposition to seek opportunities, or to embrace

* The late Abraham Tucker, Esq. author of "The Light of Nature," and of "The Light of Nature and Revelation pursued, by Edward Search, Esq."

those that occur, of rendering themselves useful to their generation.

Another cause, which keeps out of the sight of those who are concerned in them the duties that belong to superior stations, is a language from their infancy familiar to them, namely, "that they are placed above work." I have always considered this as a most unfortunate phraseology. And, as habitual modes of speech have no small effect upon public sentiment, it has a direct tendency to make one portion of mankind envious, and the other idle. The truth is, every man has his work. The kind of work varies, and that is all the difference there is. A great deal of labour exists beside that of the hands—many species of industry beside bodily operation; equally necessary, requiring equal assiduity, more attention, more anxiety. It is not true, therefore, that men of elevated stations are exempted from work; it is only true, that there is assigned to them work of a different kind: whether more easy, or more pleasant, may be questioned, but certainly not less wanted, not less essential to the common good. Were this maxim once properly received as a principle of conduct, it would put men of fortune and rank upon inquiring, what were the opportunities of doing good (for some, they may depend upon it, there are), which in a more especial manner belonged to their situation or condition? and were this principle carried into any thing like its full effect, or even this way of thinking sufficiently inculcated, it would completely remove the invidiousness of elevated stations. Mankind would see in them this alternative: if such men discharged the duties which were attached to the advantages they enjoyed, they deserved these advantages; if they did not, they were, morally

speaking, in the situation of a poor man who neglected his business and his calling, and in no better. And the proper reflection in both cases is the same: the individual is in a high degree culpable, yet the business and the calling beneficial and expedient.

The habit and the disposition which we wish to recommend, namely, that of casting about for opportunities of doing good, readily seizing those which accidentally present themselves, and faithfully using those which naturally and regularly belong to our situations, appear to be sometimes checked by a notion, very natural to active spirits, and to flattered talents: "they will not be content to do little things—they will either attempt mighty matters, or do nothing." The small effect which the private endeavours of an individual can produce upon the mass of social good is so lost, and so unperceived, in the comparison, that it neither deserves, they think, nor rewards, the attention which it requires. The answer is, that the comparison which thus discourages them ought never to be made. The good which their efforts can produce may be too minute to bear any sensible proportion to the sum of public happiness, yet may be their share, may be enough for them. The proper question is not, whether the good we aim at be great or little; still less, whether it be great or little in comparison with the whole; but whether it be the most which it is in our power to perform. A single action may be, as it were, nothing to the aggregate of moral good; so also may be the agent. It may still, therefore, be the proportion which is required of *him*. In all things nature works by numbers. Her greatest effects are achieved by the joint operation of multitudes of, separately considered, insignificant individuals. It is enough for

each that it executes its office. It is not its concern, because it does not depend upon its will, what place that office holds in, or what proportion it bears to, the general result. Let our only comparison therefore be, between our opportunities and the use which we make of them. When we would extend our views, or stretch out our hand, to distant and general good, we are commonly lost and sunk in the magnitude of the subject. Particular good, and the particular good which lies within our reach, is all we are concerned to attempt, or to inquire about. Not the smallest effort will be forgotten; not a particle of our virtue will fall to the ground. Whether successful or not, our endeavours will be recorded; will be estimated, not according to the proportion which they bear to the universal interest, but according to the relation which they hold to our means and opportunities; according to the disinterestedness, the sincerity, with which we undertook, the pains and perseverance with which we carried them on. It may be true, and I think it is the doctrine of Scripture, that the right use of great faculties or great opportunities will be more highly rewarded than the right use of inferior faculties and less opportunities. He that with ten talents had made ten talents more was placed over ten cities. The neglected talent was also given to him. He who with five talents had made five more, though pronounced to be a good and faithful servant, was placed over only five cities*. This distinction might, without any great harshness to our moral feelings, be resolved into the will of the Supreme Benefactor: but we can see, perhaps, enough of the subject to perceive that it was just. The merit may reasonably be supposed to have been more in one case

* Matt. xxv. 20, et seq.

than the other. The danger, the activity, the care, the solicitude, were greater. Still both received rewards, abundant beyond measure when compared with the services, equitable and proportioned when compared with one another.

That our obligation is commensurate with our opportunity, and that the possession of the opportunity is sufficient, without any further or more formal command, to create the obligation, is a principle of morality and of Scripture; and is alike true in all countries. But that power and property so far go together as to constitute private fortunes into public stations, as to cast upon large portions of the community occasions which render the preceding principles more constantly applicable, is the effect of civil institutions, and is found in no country more than in ours; if in any so much. With us a great part of the public business of the country is transacted by the country itself: and upon the prudent and faithful management of it depend, in a very considerable degree, the interior prosperity of the nation, and the satisfaction of great bodies of the people. Not only offices of magistracy, which affect and pervade every district, are delegated to the principal inhabitants of the neighbourhood, but there is erected in every county a high and venerable tribunal, to which owners of permanent property, down almost to their lowest classes, are indiscriminately called; and called to take part, not in the forms and ceremonies of the meeting, but in the most efficient and important of its functions. The wisdom of man hath not devised a happier institution than that of juries, or one founded in a juster knowledge of human life, or of the human capacity. In jurisprudence, as in every science, the points ultimately rest upon common sense. But to

reduce a question to these points, and to propose them accurately, requires not only an understanding superior to that which is necessary to decide upon them when proposed, but oftentimes also a technical and peculiar erudition. Agreeably to this distinction, which runs perhaps through all sciences, what is preliminary and preparatory is left to the legal profession; what is final, to the plain understanding of plain men. But since it is necessary that the judgement of such men should be informed, and since it is of the utmost importance that advice which falls with so much weight should be drawn from the purest sources; judges are sent down to us, who have spent their lives in the study and administration of the laws of their country, and who come amongst us strangers to our contentions, if we have any, our parties, and our prejudices; strangers to every thing except the evidence which they hear. The effect corresponds with the wisdom of the design. Juries may err, and frequently do so; but there is no system of error incorporated with their constitution. Corruption, terror, influence, are excluded by it; and prejudice, in a great degree, though not entirely. This danger, which consists in juries viewing one class of men, or one class of rights, in a more or less favourable light than another, is the only one to be feared and to be guarded against. It is a disposition, which, whenever it rises up in the minds of jurors, ought to be repressed by their probity, their consciences, the sense of their duty, the remembrance of their oaths.

And this institution is not more salutary, than it is grateful and honourable to those popular feelings of which all good governments are tender. Hear the language of the law: in the most momentous in-

terests, in the last peril indeed of human life, the accused appeals to God and his country, "which country you are." What pomp of titles, what display of honours, can equal the real dignity which these few words confer upon those to whom they are addressed? They show, by terms the most solemn and significant, how highly the law deems of the functions and character of a jury; they show also, with what care of the safety of the subject it is, that the same law has provided for every one a recourse to the fair and indifferent arbitration of his neighbours. This is substantial equality; real freedom: equality of protection; freedom from injustice. May it never be invaded, never abused! May it be perpetual! And it will be so, if the affection of the country continue to be preserved to it, by the integrity of those who are charged with its office.

VI.

[Preached at Durham, at the Visitation of the Right Reverend Shute, Lord Bishop of Durham.]

1 Timothy iv. 13.

Till I come give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

Next to the lessons which proceeded from our Lord himself, I know nothing that can well be imagined more interesting to a believer in Christianity than letters of advice and instruction from an original missionary of the religion to one whom he had associated with himself in the office, especially from the most active and zealous of its teachers; to a disciple and colleague favoured with his highest confidence; from the chiefest of the apostles to the most beloved of his converts.

It might be expected that the apostolic character would flow in pages which were dictated by Christian zeal united with personal affection. They came from a mind filled at all times with the momentous truths of the religion it had embraced, but now in particular excited by sentiments of the warmest friendship for the person whom he addressed; by a sense, as it should seem, of responsibility for his conduct, and by the most ardent desire for the success of his ministry. Still more important would this correspondence become, if any of the letters should appear to have been written under

circumstances the most trying to human sincerity of any in which mankind can be placed—the view of impending death; because we should presume, that under such circumstances we were reading the mind of the author without reserve or disguise—the thoughts which most constantly dwelt in it, and with which it was most powerfully impressed, without the admixture of any thing futile or extraneous.

The account which we have given does nothing more than describe the epistles of Saint Paul to Timothy, and the last part of the account belongs to the second of these epistles. "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day." In this situation of mind, and under the solemnity of these impressions, the apostle sat down to exhort his friend and his disciple. And what is there which can come with more weight to the votaries of Christianity, and above all, to the teachers of that religion, in every age of its duration, than admonitions so delivered, and from such authority? Nor do the admonitions themselves fall short of the occasion—"Watch thou in all things; endure afflictions; do the work of an evangelist; make full proof of thy ministry; preach the word; be instant in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine." These are the lessons of a master in Christianity: every word is ponderous and significant.

The peculiar circumstances under which these two epistles were written,—partaking of the qualities of a private correspondence, displaying those strong emotions of mind which the author's interest in the subject, the

native earnestness of his temper, and the pressing dangers of his situation, conspired to produce—these circumstances, I say, give to them a character in some measure distinguishable from the rest of Saint Paul's writings. They are, more than any of his epistles, methodical. They embrace three objects; they have three parts: they are doctrinal, economical, personal. But these parts, whilst each exhibits sentiments and precepts which can nowhere be excelled, are intermixed, not to say confounded, with one another. The writer is at one moment impressing upon the mind of his disciple the important propositions which constitute the religion that he taught: in the next, is called away perhaps from his train of reflection by some circumstance of local urgency, which the then state of the new society, or, it might be, of that particular church, forced upon his attention. He passes from both these topics to rules of personal conduct, adapted to the office which Timothy sustained; and the delivery of these rules formed perhaps the proper and immediate occasion of his letter.

This description accords with what might be expected in private letters between real parties, on real business. The subjects which possess the mind of the writer are seen in his letter; but seldom with the same degree of order and division as when a writing is prepared for public inspection. If this difference be observable even at present, when the advantages of method and order are understood, and when method and order themselves are become so habitual as to have pervaded every species of composition, the observation will hold still more true of the writings of an age and country in which much of this sort was unknown; and of an author, the energy of whose thought was not wont to be confined by rules of art, and whose subject overpowered all the lesser con-

siderations and attentions which a colder mind, on an occasion more indifferent, would have employed in the composition of his epistle. If we perceive, therefore, unexpected and unnoticed transitions from one topic to another, frequent recurrences to those which were left, and a consequent mixture and discontinuance of thought; what do we perceive but the effusions of a mind intent, not upon one, but upon several great subjects, occasionally possessed by each, and set loose from the restraints of method by the liberty natural to an affectionate and confidential correspondence? But I hasten from these observations on the general character of the two epistles, to the single subject which I have selected for my present discourse.

In what we have called the personal part of the epistle, Saint Paul gives to Timothy directions, as well for discharging the occasional offices of his ministry, as for the habitual regulation of his private conduct; and amongst these, as indeed it was of the first importance to do, for the fit employment of his time. The apostle expected, it appears, ere long to visit the church in which Timothy was placed. When he should do so, he might require, it was possible, from his disciples more active services in the mission in which they were both engaged. But in the mean time—in an interval, as it should seem, of comparative repose—he fails not to point out to the Ephesian bishop, beside the extraordinary or critical exertions to which he might be called by the demands of his station, the objects which ought to engage his regular and constant attention.

How then was the man and minister of God to divide his time? Between study, you hear, and teaching: "Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." Exhortation and doctrine are both put down

as being, as indeed they are, different things: the first relates to practice, the second to belief. The first is to urge upon our hearers the duties of Christianity, the second to communicate the knowledge of those articles which compose its faith—but both are parts of public instruction; and what could be spared from these was to be bestowed upon "reading." From this advice, therefore, and from this example, we collect the recommendations of a studious life; and to set forth some of the advantages and some of the satisfactions of such a life will be no unsuitable employment of the present occasion.

Now wherein, we may ask, consists the satisfaction of any life whatever?

They who have observed human nature most closely will tell you, with one voice, that it consists in a succession of exercise and rest, in the exertion of our faculties in some pursuit which interests them, and in the repose of these faculties after such exertion.

The inert and passive pleasures, as they are called, of life, or those in which we are mere recipients, are of small account in the sum and constitution of human happiness. Man was made for action—the seat of action is the mind: when he ceases to employ its powers, he not only neglects, it is probable, the duties of his station, but loses the source and principle of his own enjoyment.

These being truths drawn from experience, we are authorized to teach what is their necessary result—that it is incumbent upon every man, who is studious of his own comfort, to seek out for himself a supply of constant occupation. The subject of this occupation, to answer its purpose, must be interesting, various, accessible; suited to each man's opportunity, worthy of

his character. I hardly need say, to be allowable it must be innocent; or that it doubles every advantage belonging to it by being virtuous and useful. Now what employment of our time can we propose in which so many of these qualities concur, as in the pursuits of learning?

It must be a stupid or frivolous mind indeed, to which no science is interesting. Such also is the compass of human research, that the understanding expatiates in unbounded variety. Study is as diversified as nature itself, because it hath nature for its object; nay, it adds to nature the operations of art, the knowledge of language, the testimony of ages. Secondly; it reckons also amongst its recommendations, that it is within the reach of almost every man's opportunity who possesses the inclination. It is at the mercy of external circumstances less than any other engagement to which we can addict ourselves; it depends not upon season, climate, or place. Thirdly; different studies have both a different general value, and also a different propriety, according to the profession of the person who cultivates them, but all science is ingenuous and liberal. No station was ever degraded by study: there never was, nor will be, the age or country of the world in which learning was not respected. Lastly; it must be owing to a depravity of taste seldom heard of, that study is ever vicious; and to a singular misfortune of choice, and defect of judgement, that it is not always useful*.

But when we speak of study, either as an exercise of

* To the dogma that truth alone is immutable, might it not be added that nothing but learning is permanent? The writings of Greece have long survived every place which they commemorate. We have Homer in our hands—we seek in vain for Troy. The alphabet of Cadmus is preserved—his seven-gated city lies in the dust.

duty or a source of satisfaction, it ought to be known what we mean by the term. We have stated one, indeed the first requisite, of a life of satisfaction to be, the application of our faculties to some interesting pursuit. To bring study within this description, it must be such as is attended with an exertion of our understanding. I do not say that it is necessary the subject should be abstruse, or the application always intense; but it must be such as to solicit a positive effort of the mind. I the rather mention this, because it is possible, and I am afraid not very uncommon, to make reading as idle an occupation as any of those in which the most trifling of mankind consume their time. There is reading without method or object; in which the mind is entirely passive, without endeavour to investigate, collect, or retain—reading, in a word, without thought. From this reading, or ever so much of it, no knowledge can spring. It assumes not—it ought not to assume—the name of study. It affords not the satisfaction of which we speak; it is not what we mean: nay, its tendency is rather to dissipate than to fix attention, to dissolve than to call forth the intellectual functions, to destroy that patience of thought upon which all progression of science depends.

But every argument, by which study can be recommended to others, is doubled upon the clergy. Thus religion, by its very nature, calls for a great degree of

In like manner of the labours of our countrymen; the time may come when no monuments shall remain but of their learning. A discovery in science, the improvement of an art, a just sentiment, or even a beautiful line, may be recorded with respect, when it shall cease to be known where the metropolis of this island stood. It is enough to have mentioned this reflection, in order to show the place in dignity and perpetuity which learning holds, amongst the effects of human industry or the distinctions of human life.

it. It is an historical religion, founded upon transactions which took place, and upon discourses which were held, in a distant age and country of the world; in a language, and under a state of opinion and customs, very different from our own. It is evident that the knowledge of such a religion cannot be transmitted in its purity without scholars. It is not possible that every Christian should be a scholar; but it is necessary that a knowledge of the original records of the religion should reside somewhere: and from whom can this be expected, if it be not found with those who profess themselves to be public teachers of its doctrines?

A volume is spread out before us, containing intelligence, which, if true, is of infinite and of universal value. To investigate the authority, and to interpret the sense of these important pages, is one of the most respectable offices which can be imposed upon learning or talents—and that office is ours. The return, the appeal, must always be to original information, and to those who are furnished with the means of acquiring it. It is with Christianity as with other subjects of importance, multitudes may be benefited by the knowledge of a few.

And as the clergy are called upon by the duties, and by one at least of the confessed designs of their order, to give attendance to "reading,"—so are they invited to it by the leisure and tranquillity usually indulged to their situation, and by the habits of life which best, which alone, I might have said, befit their profession.

Retiredness is the very characteristic of our calling; it is impossible to be a good clergyman and to be always upon the streets, or to be continually mixing with the diversions, the follies, or even the business and pursuits of the world.

And in our church, the offices of religion assigned to her ministers, though they well deserve to be performed with seriousness and punctuality, and being so performed are sufficient for Christian edification, are yet neither so numerous nor prolix as not to leave large portions of our time unoccupied. Of these vacancies study is the application and the resource. It has been truly said to be impossible that learning of any kind should flourish with a description of persons of whom no one was at his ease. This complaint, however, belongs not to us as a body. Amongst the clergy of the Church of England, many, without doubt, are very much at their ease. The proper return for this privilege, the proper use of the opportunity, is to convert it to beneficial study. But we go farther. If there be a danger or disadvantage in the clerical profession, which does not belong equally to other professions—I mean with respect to the person's own comfort and satisfaction—it is the having too much time at liberty, and too little engagement for it. I have known deplorable examples of the spirits sinking under this vacuity; oftener, perhaps, of their taking refuge in resources which were hardly innocent, or, if innocent in their kind, indecorous by their excess. A literary station without learning is always gloomy to the possessor. Every thing which should have been a benefit to him becomes a burthen. The calm and silence which should dispose to meditation induces only melancholy. In the leisure to which the contemplative mind returns as to its home, the person we speak of sees nothing but a banishment from recreation or cheerfulness. There is no greater difference in the human character than in the disposition of different men towards retirement. The longing with which some seek, the delight with which they enjoy, and the reluctance with which they

leave it, contrasted with the impatience by which others endure, or the fear with which they dread it, form an opposition of choice and temper both remarkable in itself, and upon which the happiness of individuals and their suitableness for the station which they occupy very much depend.

It can admit of no question which of these two is the temper for a clergyman. That which is desirable by him (I think by all, but certainly by him) results from the conduct of the mind, when it is not acted upon by strong internal impressions; from the power at those times of commanding the objects of its thoughts, and directing it to such as will detain its attention, exercise its faculties, and reward its pursuits. This ability cannot subsist without a love of knowledge, and, what must always accompany a love of knowledge, or rather indeed is the thing itself, a taste and relish for instructive reading. This being felt, retirement is no longer either slothful or tedious, leisure tasteless, or even solitude without support.

Perhaps no moments are passed with so much complacency as those which a scholar spends in his study; none with less perception of their weight or tardiness, less sense of restlessness or desire of change; I will add, none in which alacrity of spirits is better sustained. Few things are more exhilarating than the successful investigation of an important truth: or even where probability alone is attainable, the discovery or prosecution of a just argument is an employment always grateful to a sound and cultivated understanding. It seems scarcely necessary that we should mention the pleasures which are derived from every branch of elegant literature. It is a recommendation likewise of this mode of passing our time, that it is without expense of for-

tune; and a still greater, that it is never followed by disgust or reproach.

But what, it will be asked, shall we study? I am supplied with an answer to the question by the very terms of our ordination service; which after having stated the weightiness of our office and its duties, exhorts us with much solemnity "to draw all our cares and studies this way:"—in which words two things are implied. First; that the more directly our studies bear upon the separate object of our profession, the better they fulfil the obligations which we have undertaken. It cannot be doubted but that the reading to which Timothy was to give attendance related closely to the mission in which he was engaged; most likely, that it was confined to the Jewish Scriptures, to the Law (as they were then divided), the Psalms, and the Prophets. If Saint Paul has nowhere spoken with respect, and sometimes disparagingly, of the learning of his age and country, it was for two reasons which do not apply to us: one, that this learning was in a great degree frivolous; the other, that any learning was unnecessary for an apostle, his knowledge of some points being inspired, of others original, immediate, and sensible. With believers of future ages the case is different. What the apostles saw with their eyes, and handled with their hands, of the Word of Life, we must discover by inquiry and research. They knew with certainty, and they testified with courage; but their knowledge and testimony can only reach us through the medium of a dead language, and by the interpretation of ancient records. The subject also of Divine Revelation itself we approach with more advantage for being prepared with the information which composes and constitutes the basis of natural religion.

Therefore, secondly, I do not consider the injunction

at our ordination as prohibiting to us all other studies, but rather as requiring from us that, whatever be the study which we have chosen, we make it subservient to the diffusion and illustration of Christianity. Draw it this way, and I believe what the precept of our liturgy directs us to do to be more practicable than is generally understood. Have languages been the early and favourite subject of our studies—have we possessed ourselves of that golden key, which unlocks the treasures of the ancient world—it *is*, that we may employ our acquirements in elucidating the writings which transmit to us the history and canon of our faith. When the works of ancient authors are to be explained, grammar and criticism must lend their aid, let the subject of which they treat be what it will. In none certainly is this aid more wanted than in those in which the ideas expressed are not ideas of sense. Sciences, still more remote from religion in appearance, will be found capable of being brought into connexion with it. Are we geometricians, algebraists, or analysts, it is in order to become sound and accurate philosophers: and of true philosophy the first business is to explore and to display the agency of a benevolent Power. For instance, there exists not so decisive a proof of design, and of contrivance to accomplish it, as in the structure of the eye of animals: but this proof, and indeed this contrivance entirely depends upon optical principles; which principles can only be known and explained by the application of a very subtle geometry.

Observe, therefore, how we ascend from lines and angles to the most momentous and sublime truths. These enable us to trace the action of different surfaces and different media upon rays of light; which being

ascertained, we discover in the organ of vision an apparatus, complex indeed, which increases the wonder, but accurately adapted to that action. What is this, but to discover God?

The same remark, if not more true, is perhaps still more striking, when applied to astronomy. Not the conjecture (for active imaginations can conjecture any thing), but the demonstration of that system, is justly ranked amongst the noblest efforts of the human intellect. Yet could it be conceived, unless we know it to be so, that whilst Newton and his predecessors in the same studies were investigating the properties of a conic section, they were tracing the finger of the Almighty in the heavens? Nor let it be said that this is foreign from Christianity—for the presence in the universe of a supreme mind being once established upon these principles, the business of religion is half done. Of such a Being we can never cease to think. We shall receive with readiness the history of his dispensations, and with deeper submission every intimation of his will. Of the several branches of natural history the application is more obvious. They all tend to the discovery or confirmation of a just theology: they inspire those sentiments which Christianity wishes to find in her disciples.

But here we are met by a reflection more than sufficiently discouraging, arising from the imbecility of our faculties, and the frequent disappointment and unsatisfactoriness of our inquiries. Did learning, in the several subjects upon which it is employed, turn darkness into light, doubt into certainty, or always remove our difficulties, every step in its progress would be marked by pleasure and contentment; but a different representation is nearer to the

truth. Some doubts will continue, some difficulties will remain, in a great degree such as they were, and new ones will spring up. Yet much, after all these deductions, will be gained; and for the rest, we have the consciousness to rely upon, that we have discharged our duty to the subject, and the inquiry according to the measure of our faculties and opportunities; and the assurance, that having done this, neither ignorance, nor doubt, nor error, will be imputed to us as voluntary offences—that although they may sometimes perplex, as they will do, or distress us here, we have nothing to fear from their consequences hereafter. Much, I say, will after all be gained; and in no article of satisfaction shall we perceive the advantage of a contemplative life more than in that fixedness of temper by which we shall be taught to view the changes and chances of a transitory world. Many secular studies have this tendency. When a philosopher surveys the magnificence and stability of nature, seen in regions of immeasurable space—worlds revolving round worlds with inconceivable rapidity, yet with such exactness as to be found to circumvolve at the point where they are expected; or when he sees upon the globe which he inhabits the same nature proceeding in her grand and beneficial operations with unconcerned regularity—when from these speculations his mind is carried to observe the strifes and contentions of men, the rise and decline of their institutions and establishments, what does he experience in the greatest of these changes but the little vicissitudes of little things? Again, when he advances his meditations from the works of nature to its Author, his attributes, his dispensations, his promises, his word, his will,—most especially, when he looks to the wonders and the mercies of a renovated

existence, to the tutelary hand of his Creator conducting him safely through the different stages of his being—through the grave and gate of death to an order of things disposed and appointed for the reward of faith and virtue, as the present is for trial and improvement; when he reflects how entirely this change supersedes all others, how fast it approaches, and how soon it will take place—in what a state of inferiority, I had almost said of indifference, is every interest placed in which it is not included? And if ever there was a time when that stedfastness of mind, which ought to result from the study and contemplation of divine subjects, is more wanted than at another, it is the present. It is our lot to live in a disturbed and eventful period. During the concussions which have shaken, and are yet shaking, the social edifice to its foundation; in the fate which we have seen of every thing man calls great, of power, of wealth, and splendour—where shall thought find refuge, except in the prospects which Christianity unfolds, and in a well-grounded confidence that Christianity is true? And this support will not fail us. Erect amidst the ruins of a tottering age, the pilgrim proceeds in his course without perturbation or dismay: endeavouring, indeed, according to his power, and interceding earnestly for, the peace and welfare of a world, through which he is but directing his constant eye to a more abiding city, —to that country beyond the great river, to which the sojourning tribes are bound, and where there remaineth rest for the people of God.

SERMONS

ON PARTICULAR OCCASIONS.

I.

ADVENT.

MATTHEW XI. 3.

Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

THE Advent of Jesus Christ into the world, which the order of our public service proposes at this season to our thoughts, the appearance he made, and the character he assumed, compared with the circumstances and expectations of the age and country in which he lived, contain attestations to the truth of the evangelical history which I shall make it my business, as it will not be unsuitable to the occasion, to lay before you; and suggest reflections which will serve both to confirm the truth of our religion, and to explain some points and passages of the New Testament which are well deserving of observation.

It is clearly to be collected from Scripture, that about the time of our Lord's coming, some great person, who was to be called Messiah or Christ, by the Jews, was expected to appear amongst them, who also would prove a mighty chief and conqueror; and by the aid, it should seem, of supernatural powers, not only deliver the Jewish nation from the subjection into which they had been

brought to the Roman government, but place that nation and himself at the head of them, in the highest condition of prosperity, and in possession of the universal empire of the world. Traces of this opinion, both of the coming of this extraordinary person, and of what he was to do when he did come, are dispersed in various parts of the New Testament:—"Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" "When Christ cometh, will he do more (or do more miracles) than this man doeth?" "I know," saith the woman of Samaria, "that Messias cometh; when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is: tell us whether thou be Christ or no." Herod demanded of the wise men where Christ should be born. It was revealed to Simeon that he should not die before he had seen Christ. "Shall Christ come out of Galilee?" "Hath not the Scripture said that Christ cometh of the seed of David?" "We know that Christ abideth for ever." "Men mused in their hearts of John, whether *he* was the Christ." From these, and some other similar expressions, it is manifest that there was a previous and prevailing expectation that an extraordinary person, who was to be called Christ, or the Messiah, was at that time to appear.

Then as to the second point, what he was to do when he came: "We trusted it had been he," said his two disciples, "who should have saved Israel." And again, upon his appearance to them after his resurrection, "Wilt thou at this time," they asked him, "restore again the kingdom to Israel?" And this notion of theirs, that he was to set up a kingdom upon earth, and become a mighty prince and conqueror in the world, is proved by, and accounts for, a great number of incidents recorded in the Gospels.

It was this that alarmed Herod so much when he heard reports of the miraculous birth. Herod then possessed the kingdom of Judea. Now he, together with the other Jews, expected that Christ which should appear would become a king, by conquering and taking Herod's kingdom from him; and this apprehension urged him to the desperate expedient of destroying all the children in Bethlehem who were about the age that agreed with the supernatural circumstances that had been talked of. Had Herod looked for no more than a moral teacher, a spiritual ruler, he would have had nothing to fear. This opinion likewise accounts for their attempting to make him a king, when they were convinced by the miracle of the loaves and fishes, "that he was, of a truth, that prophet that should come into the world," John vi. 15. And also for their receiving him with the pomp and ceremony of an earthly prince when he entered into Jerusalem, cutting down branches, and spreading their garments upon the road, and crying, "blessed be the king that cometh in the name of the Lord."

This same reason also accounts for the sudden and seemingly strange revolution in the sentiments of the people concerning him. Those who received him with much acclamation, and would not be restrained by the rules from paying him the greatest honours, in a few days afterwards we find crying out that he should be crucified. The case was, when they introduced him to Jerusalem, they supposed that he should forthwith show and make himself, what they had no doubt Christ was to be, a great and mighty conqueror; conquering, probably, by some supernatural assistance, all who opposed him, and delivering his own nation from servitude and subjection to power and glory. When no-

thing of this came to pass, the disappointment provoked them, and they were as eager to punish him as they were before to acknowledge him for their deliverer. This earthly kingdom was what the two sons of Zebedee had in view when they prevailed upon their mother to ask him that they might sit, one at his right hand and the other at his left; that is, be both chief men under him in his kingdom. And this we see was also the source of the frequent strifes and disputings amongst them, who should be greatest in that expected promotion to power and glory. Lastly, this was the cause that they could never believe, nor so much as comprehend the many notices he gave them of his approaching crucifixion, because all idea of his being put to death like a malefactor was absolutely inconsistent with the notions which they and all the Jews firmly maintained, that he was to be king himself, and a deliverer of the Jewish nation.

When he told them, upon their going up to Jerusalem, that he should be delivered unto the Gentiles, mocked, spitefully intreated, spitted on, and that they should scourge him and put him to death; we read that they *understood* none of these things, and the saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken. And in confirmation of what has been said, I have only to remark, that the Jews at that day expected both a Messiah to appear, and that, when he should appear, he would make them masters of their own land again, and of the world.

Such, therefore, were the opinions and expectations then actually prevailing amongst the Jewish people. Now what I contend for is, that had Jesus, in professing himself, as he did, to be the king of the Jews, been either an impostor or enthusiast, or any other

(which he must have been, if the Christian religion be not true), he might have founded his pretensions on any other thing than truth; he would necessarily have fallen in with the established opinion of the country, and produced himself in the character which they expected. Suppose he was an impostor, and had a scheme of taking advantage of the popular expectation, to impose himself upon the Jews for the great person whose appearance they were looking for, it was certainly his business to have framed his account and pretensions agreeably to those expectations.

Had he been an enthusiast whose enthusiasm, or madness, if you choose to call it so, had been so far infected with the popular phrensy as to imagine itself to be the person promised and expected, then such enthusiasm must at the same time have unavoidably led him to *prove* himself to be such an one, and to be and to do what these expectations pointed out. And what is a better proof than any reasonings, the fact was so. All the false Christs, all the pretended Messiahs, of which there have been some hundreds, have to a man given themselves out to be the destined deliverers of the Jewish nation, and improvers of the world. We read in the Acts of the Apostles of Theudas and Judas, who, before the days of the Apostles, had drawn much people after them. Josephus, the famous Jewish historian, mentions only nine by name, and multitudes of others whom he does not name conformably with our Saviour's prediction: "that there should arise false Christs, false prophets, and deceive many." Some of these might be impostors whom the expectations of the times and consequent eagerness to listen to such pretences called forth; others might be enthusiasts, whose disturbed imagination caught the contagion from

the public throng. But both the one and the other, expectants and enthusiasts, they who adapted these things to the received prejudices of the age, boasted and professed to be what they knew their followers wished for, or what they and every one expected.

Now why Christ did not go along with the rest who have called themselves Messiahs, if he was like them, it will be difficult to say. But where, it will be asked, did our Saviour in fact differ or depart from the common and received notion of what the Messiah was to be? This remains to be shown.

Now the difference consists in this: that whereas the Messiah, according to the Jewish notion, was to be in his nature a mere man, and like all other men, but in his condition in the world exalted to summits of honour and grandeur above the kings and princes of this world; he, on the contrary, describes himself, and is described by his followers, as low and mean in his outward visible condition, but in his nature very different from the whole race of mankind.

First; I say that the Jewish Messiah was, in their expectation, to be a mere man. The Jews did not suppose Moses himself to be any thing more; nor is there any trace that they had a conception of any thing more in the Messiah. None of the false Messiahs set up for any thing different as to their nature from an ordinary man. The Jews themselves were at a loss to understand those expressions of our Saviour, by which he intended to intimate the distinction and superiority of his own nature. This was so little thought of, that they were unable to resolve the difficulty he proposed to them: "If Christ be David's son, how calleth he him the Lord?"

But in his condition their Messiah is to be exalted

to superior power and dignity; he is to rule and triumph over all the enemies of the Jewish state; he was to restore the kingdom to Israel; he was to sit upon the throne of his father David, and reign over the house of Jacob for ever. All these expressions the Jews interpreted and applied literally. The contrary, however, of all this, our Saviour represents his worldly condition, which it evidently was—so mean and low, and humble and contemptible—born in a manger, and of parents of very inferior station—brought up with these parents—appearing, when he did appear, with a few poor fishermen—without name, fortune, or learning—the son of man had not where to lay his head—indebted to the benevolence of a certain Galilean who ministered unto him of his substance. He came, indeed, as he expresses it, to minister to others, and not to be ministered unto himself; and at last, as he all along foretold he should be, was delivered to the malice of the Jews, and to the power of the Roman yoke. He never attempted to shake off the Roman yoke, nor encouraged any such attempts in his followers; on the contrary, he withdrew himself when the populace would have hailed their king. He disclaimed the idea of altering or subverting the civil governments of the world—the very purpose for which the Jewish Messiah was expected—expressly declaring that his kingdom was not of this world, and replying, when he was requested to interfere in a private dispute, "Man, who made me a judge over you?"

Secondly; but if the condition in which our Saviour appeared exceedingly disappointed the Jewish expectation, the nature of which he described himself to be differed as much from what they conceived or expected.

He described himself as a being, though in form and fashion as a mere man, yet in reality, and in his nature, far transcending the whole human race—*far*, inasmuch as these are but creatures of a birth; "Dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return." He was from the beginning,—"before Abraham;"—possessed glory with the Father before the world was. "He came forth from the Father, and came into the world, as he left the world, and went to the Father." "He came down from heaven, even as he *ascended up* to heaven."

Again; we believe that there are orders of creation in the universe much above us, as much, at least, as we are above the brute creation. He was elevated far beyond all these, a "being so much better than these, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they,"—for unto which of the angels, said he, at any time, "thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?"

Again; whereas no man hath seen God at any time: he was with the Father, in the bosom of the Father; he spake that which he had seen with the Father—the Father loved him, and showed him all things.

Again; he was next and dearest to his father, above and beyond all creatures: he was not only the first born of every creature, but of all others "the only begotten of the Father;" which phrase must needs denote a relation, unknown, it is true, and unintelligible to us, but of peculiar value to him, and well understood. He was appointed also to be judge of the quick and the dead; "for the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." "It is he," saith St. Peter, "which was ordained of God to be the judge of the quick and dead." "We shall all

stand," St. Paul assures us, "before the judgment-seat of Christ."

Lastly; he was invested by the Father with power to raise us up, to recall us to life at the last day. "For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; *i. e.* to have the same power over life." "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise them up at the last day." "I am the resurrection and the life; as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." It seems by this, not only figuratively, but literally true, that through the sin of Adam human nature became mortal. By the efficacy and power of Christ, the same nature is made capable of a restoration to life. "It is he," St. Paul assures us, "who is to change our vile body, that it may be like his glorious body."

Now these several particulars put together compose a character, or more properly speaking, a nature, not only different from any thing the Jews looked for from the Messiah, and in many particulars the reverse of it; but it is entirely, absolutely, and truly original. There was no example that could suggest it, no precedent to authorise it.

The next natural, and as I have argued already, not at all improbable, supposition, had he been guided by any thing else than truth, was, that he would be seen just what the Jews expected the Messiah should be seen; that these expectations had suggested the thought, and were to be the foundation of his claims, and the means of success.

But had our Saviour presented himself as a public and better instructor of mankind in his day, he would

have had examples of this in the old philosophers. Had he assumed the character of a Jew, to the Jews he would have been a second Moses. Had he appeared an inspired prophet, instances of such had been of old frequent among the Jews.

But why he should not only depart from the established persuasion of his own country, and of all the world, concerning the Messiah who was expected, but assume pretensions different and unforeseen, superior to any of these already mentioned, and without any instance or example to lead to or suggest such a scheme and character, unless he was, as we believe him to be, really and truly what he called himself, it seems impossible to account for.

The character of Christ is single and alone in the history of mankind. If he was an impostor, there never was such lame and useless imposture. If he was an enthusiast, produce an instance of any character made up so well of enthusiasm, so calm, so rational, so sublime.

II.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

MATT. XVII. 54.

Truly this was the Son of God.

OUR Saviour's miraculous birth, and still more miraculous life, distinguished him from every person that ever appeared in the world. History affords nothing like him—and these miracles form, no doubt, our assurance, that "He was sent from God." He preserved his pretensions by his works: the wonders of his nativity were followed by the performances of his life. This was the reason his followers believed on him at the time; and this must be a reason for believing on him, throughout all ages.

But, with considerate minds, there is a further reason for believing in him, exceedingly impressive, and that is, the excellency of his character. In this respect he surpasses the best men, of whom we have any knowledge. It might be expected that it would be so, with so great, so distinguished a messenger, sent from God; and it was so.

Pilate said of Jesus, "I find no fault with this man," and he spoke truly; nor has any one, that has examined his history, ever been able to lay a single charge against his conduct. The temper of his soul and the tenor of his life were blameless throughout. From the first moment of his birth (which we this day com-

memorate) to his last agony on the cross, he never once fell into the smallest error of conduct; never once "spake unadvisedly with his lips." This is a negative kind of excellence; but observe, it is more than can be said of any person, that ever yet came into the world. But however, though a thing so extraordinary is to be found in no other man, it formed but a small part of that perfection, which belonged to our Lord Jesus. He was not only exempt from every the slightest failing, but he possessed and practised every imaginable virtue, that was consistent with his situation; and that too, in the highest degree of excellence, to which virtue is capable of being exalted. We may in particular fix upon the following points of his character; namely, his zeal for the service, his resignation to the will, his complete obedience to the commands, of his heavenly Father. These constituted his piety. Then, the compassion, the kindness, the solicitude, the tenderness, he showed for the whole human race, even for the worst of sinners, and the bitterest of his enemies. These constituted, if such qualities can constitute, unparalleled benevolence. Then again; the perfect command he had over his own passions; and the exquisite prudence, with which he eluded all the snares that were laid for him; the wisdom, the justice of his replies; the purity and the gentleness of his manners; the sweetness, yet dignity of his deportment; the mildness with which he reproved the mistakes, the prejudices, and the failings of his disciples; the temper he preserved under the severest provocations from his enemies; the patience, and composure, and meekness, with which he endured the cruellest insults, and the grossest indignities; the fortitude he displayed under the most painful and ignominious death, that human ingenuity could devise, or

human malice inflict; and that divinely charitable prayer, which he put up for his murderers in the midst of his agony, "Father, forgive them! for they know not what they do:" these concur to render the head and founder of our religion beyond comparison the greatest, according to true greatness; the wisest, according to true wisdom; and, in every sense, the best of men.

However, our Lord's proper office in the world was that of a public teacher. In that character, therefore, we ought more particularly to view him. And, in the first place, how astonishing, how inspired, and from what source inspired, must the mind of that man be, who could entertain so vast a thought in so low a condition, as that of instructing and reforming the whole world—a world, at that time more particularly, divided between atheism and superstition; but universally abandoned to sin; differing perhaps in the forms of their idolatry, but agreeing in giving loose to their passions and desires; a plan, I say, of teaching not a few hearers, not a few congregations, not a few towns or cities, not a single country or nation, but the whole race of mankind; for to that length did his plan, not his personal ministry, but the plan of his religion, extend. Surely such a plan was only to be found in the Son of God. In the execution of this immense design, what condescension without meanness, what majesty without pride, what firmness without obstinacy, what zeal without bitterness or enthusiasm, what piety without superstition, does our Lord display! In his discourses and instructions all was calmness. No emotions, no violence, no agitation, when he delivered the most sublime and affecting doctrines, and most comfortable, or most terrifying predictions. The prophets before him fainted

and sunk under the communications, which they received from above, so strong was the impression, so unequal their strength; but truths, that overwhelmed the *servants* of God, were familiar to his *Son*. He was composed upon the greatest occasions. He was tried every way; by wicked men; by the wicked one; by weak or false friends, as well as by open enemies. He proved himself superior to every artifice, to every temptation, to every difficulty.

It *was* asked, and will always be asked, "whence had this man these things—and what wisdom is this, that is given unto him?" He had no means or opportunity of cultivating his understanding, or improving his heart. He was born, as the history testifies, in a low and indigent condition. He was without education, without learning, without any models to form himself upon, either in his own time and in his own country, or in any records of former ages, that were at all likely to fall into his hands. Yet, notwithstanding these great disadvantages—disadvantages I mean to a mere mortal man, he supported, throughout a most singular and difficult life, such wisdom and such virtue, as were never before found united; and we may venture to say, never will be again united in any human being.

Our Lord's history is given us in the Gospels in a very plain, unornamented manner, and so much the better. There is an air of godly sincerity, of simplicity, and of solid undisguised truth in every thing, which is related. Nothing is wrought up with art: no endeavour to place things in the fairest light: no praise or panegyric, or very little: no solicitude to dwell on the most favourable, or striking, or illustrious parts of our Saviour's character. These circumstances added to the whole turn and tenor of the Evangelist's writings,

prove that they followed truth, and fact, and nothing else. Lay open then the Bible before you, regard and contemplate the character of our Lord Jesus Christ, as it is there candidly and honestly set forth.

Again, if Jesus be the Son of God, then every thing which he taught comes to us with the weight and sanction of divine authority; and demands, from every sincere disciple of Christ, implicit belief, and implicit obedience. Christ delivered all his doctrines in the name of God: all of them, therefore, from their nature are to be received. He has given no man a license to adopt as much or as little of them as he thinks fit. He has authorised no human being to "add thereto, or diminish therefrom." We are not to receive one precept, and refuse another; we are not to receive one article of belief, and reject another article of belief; all are stamped by the same authority, and that authority is decisive. There may be truths very imperfectly apprehended by our finite understandings. There is nothing surprising in this; on the contrary, it was natural and reasonable to expect it to be so, in a revelation pertaining to that incomprehensible Being, "the High and Mighty One, that inhabiteth eternity." But we have this for our trust and consolation: we have a heavenly guide, we may put ourselves without reserve into his hands, and submit our judgments with boundless confidence to his direction; "for He is the way, and the truth, and the life:" we must obey him with our understandings, we must obey him with our wills.

"Let us bring, therefore," according to the strong expression of the Apostle, "let us bring every thought to the obedience of Christ, receiving with meekness the ingrafted word, that is able to save our souls."

III.

LENT.

2 Cor. vii. 10.

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of.

The piety of good men in good times having appointed this season of Lent for a more particular attention to the concerns of religion, and especially that momentous part of religion, inward penitence and contrition; I know not how I can employ the beginning of this season better than by setting before you the nature of repentance; so far, at least, as to point out the marks and rules by which we may judge of its truth, and its sincerity.

And when I talk of judging of the sincerity of repentance, I do not mean other men's repentance, but our own. Under these words I shall apply myself to consider the rules and tokens, whereby we may judge of the sincerity of repentance; not of other men's repentance, with which we have nothing to do, but of our own. Repentance is a change of the heart, from an evil to a good disposition. When that change is made, repentance is true. This is a short definition of repentance; but it will of itself teach us many truths concerning the subject. As 1st, that sorrow for our past sins, however earnest and contrite it be, is not alone

repentance. Repentance is the change of the disposition. Sorrow for the past is likely to produce that change, which always accompanies it; but still it is not the change itself, nor indeed does it, as experience testifies, always and certainly work that change.

Sorrow for the past must necessarily be a part of repentance: for why should we repent, or wish to repent, of that for which we are not sorry? but still it is only a part; and it is extremely material that we do not mistake a part of our duty for the whole. When the change, as I said, is made, repentance is complete, and not till then. Sorrow or contrition are the instruments and means towards that change; but if the instrument does not perform its office, and if the means do not produce the end, still all the instruments and means then go for nothing. 2dly. If you ask whether repentance be in its nature a sudden and hasty thing, to be brought about at once, and as some think at a single instant, at a precise and perceivable moment: I answer, that usually, perhaps, it is not. Repentance is the change of the disposition. Few changes are made on a sudden; at least few sudden changes are lasting. If there be constitutional vices of mind and temper, it is equally the work of long reflection and endeavour to beat them down, and keep them down. If there be some old confirmed habit of gratification to contend with, the struggle is commonly tedious, even when it is successful. This I say for the sake of those who, because they do not find their change at once, give up; who quit the contest, because it continues longer than they were prepared to expect. The duty of such is comprised in one word—perseverance, and a determined perseverance, is the very substance of virtue.

Almost every man can be sorry for his sins: every

man can deplore and forsake them. Most men, indeed, make some short-lived efforts to become virtuous; but perseverance is what they want, and fail in. Yet in one sense there is one essential change made in every sinner who repents; which change consists in this, that whereas before he was growing worse, he is now growing better. His improvement may be slow, but be it ever so slow, there is still this difference between growing better and growing worse. It resembles, to my apprehension, the case of a patient in a fever. We say that his distemper has had a turn; yet take him an hour or a day past the turn, or so much before, and you will observe little alteration: for the alteration is, that whereas he was before growing worse, and weaker, by almost insensible degrees, so now he is growing better and stronger, though by degrees equally slow. And this the physician accounts a great alteration; and so it is, although it be long before he be well; and though he be in perpetual danger of a relapse, during the progress of his recovery. And the physician pronounces expressly, that there has been a turn in the disorder; that the crisis is past, not because his patient is now well, who before was ill; but because he finds him now gradually growing stronger and well, who before was gradually becoming ill.

Thus the sinner may securely, though humbly, hope that he has repented, who observes himself growing continually better; who is conscious that he is in an amended state, though there be yet much to be done and suffered, before the amendment be complete. And as the patient was far from being out of danger, because he had passed the turn, so is the sinner. As the patient often relapses, so does the sinner. As the relapse is often more fatal than the first sickness; so is it

with the sinner: as the patient must still, for a long time, use extraordinary care and caution, so must the sinner.

On the other hand, there may be some few instances of very hasty reformation; of the libertine, the drunkard, the profane, the swearer, the knave, the thief, the miser, becoming on a sudden modest, sober, serious, honest, charitable: and some, though still fewer, of extraordinary changes of temper; of the proud, the overbearing, the passionate, the envious, the quarrelsome, the malicious, becoming mild, patient, generous, forbearing, and forgiving. And when we do see such instances, we ought to rejoice at them, rather than suspect them. The frame of the mind may receive such a wrench at once, as to give it a happy turn. All I mean to say is, that this is not common; that the sinner must not be surprised and disheartened, because it was not his case. He is not to let go, or leave off, because his old sins and old habits will return. The work is begun at least. It is for his comfort, I say again, that he grows better. In the same way may be determined, in the third place, the question—Is repentance ever brought about by calamity and affliction, or sickness? Repentance is the change of the disposition; and if the change be but made, no matter by what cause it is effected. The disposition is still changed, and the repentance is true. Besides which, we have good reason to believe that judgments and visitations, and sore calamities, afflictions and sickness, are sent and permitted by our gracious Governor for this very purpose of bringing us to repentance, and a better sense of things. It must not be made, therefore, an objection to the efficacy of our repentance, that it springs from the root, which God himself hath planted.

The sinner need not suspect the sincerity of his repentance, or doubt concerning its being accepted with God, merely because he was first put upon it by some misfortune, sickness, or great affliction.

Repentance we describe to be a change of the heart, from an evil to a good disposition. But how are we to know when the change is made? That is the question. In the general state of a christian life, repentance is such a sorrow for sin as produces a change of *manners*, and an actual amendment of life. It is that disposition of mind by which "he who stole, steals no more;" by which "the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right." And to the man thus actually reformed, it is expressly promised, "that he shall save his soul alive." Of this repentance the proof is visible, and the sincerity certain, because the new state of mind is discovered, by a new train of outward actions. I say, this is the nature of repentance; in the general state of christian life, where life and opportunity are left to the penitent: and then, to be sure there is no authority for us to say, that repentance will be effectual without amendment; and that the repentance which is thus proved and followed by actual amendment is not effectual.

But numerous instances occur, in which, from the nature of the case, it is impossible for the sinner to testify the truth of his repentance, either to himself or to the world, by actual reformation. It is so with the repentance of a death-bed. It is so when confinement from sickness, for crimes, or for any other cause, disables men from the duties and vices of active life. It is so where poverty puts it out of men's power to repeat their old sins; when many vices as well as many virtues are become impossible. The shortness of their time,

the distress of their situation, the feebleness of their constitutions, the narrowness and reduction of their circumstances, leave little power of active virtue, and of themselves (without any merit on their part) preclude them from the commission of most vices. Therefore some other measure must be appointed for them; because, to expect actual reformation, where virtue and vice are equally out of their power, is to require impossibilities. Here then we seem to have authority for saying, that this simple decision is the truth; namely, that God will consider that life as amended, which would have been amended, if he had spared it, and vouchsafed opportunities. Whether this would take effect, can never be known to the world. It cannot always be known to the penitent himself; but it is known to God. He can see the fruit in the blossom, or the seed. He knows those resolutions that are fixed, and would hold—those conversions which would be permanent; and will receive them who are qualified by these new dispositions and desires for works of righteousness, without exacting from them those outward duties, which the circumstances of their health, their confinement, their inability, or the shortness of their lives, hinder them from performing. Nothing therefore remains to conditions like these, but that the persons in them apply with all their strength to rectify their desires and purify their thoughts; that they set God before them in his goodness, and in his terror; that they consider him as the Father and the Judge of all the earth—as a gracious Father desirous to save—as a wise Judge who cannot, consistently with the rules of good government, pardon unrepented iniquity; that they excite in themselves an intense detestation of crimes (for if they cannot do this, it is not probable they would forsake

them if they retained the power of acting), with vehement and steady resolutions; that if life and opportunity were granted them, they should be spent hereafter in the practice of their duty; that they pray to the giver of grace to strengthen and impress these holy thoughts, and accept the repentance, though late, and in its beginning violent; that they improve any good motion by prayer; and lastly, that they deliver themselves into the hands of their faithful Creator.

The promises of acceptance and forgiveness, which are made to repentance in the Scriptures, are general; and we are not authorised to limit by exceptions, what God has not limited. So far, therefore, we may speak comfort to the contrition of a death-bed, or the circumstances relative to a death-bed, by assuring them of our hope, that God will consider that life as amended, which would have been amended, if he had spared it.

On the other hand, it is necessary that they, at least that others in different circumstances, should be apprised that their state is precarious, their hazard great; that though it be possible their present sorrow may be productive of amendment, yet experience forces us to declare, that there is nothing farther from certainty; that they have many disadvantages to contend with, their sins old and obstinate, their faculties of resistance weak, their vision clouded, distempered, distorted; that they can never be assured that their repentance would be effectual to their reformation; and consequently must leave the world, without any well grounded assurance of God's forgiveness: for it is impossible even to ourselves to distinguish the effects of terror from those of conviction—to decide whether our passions and vices be really subdued by the fear of God, or only arrested and restrained for a while by the

temporary force of present calamity. And, lastly, the deliberately and designedly putting off repentance to a death-bed makes even that repentance, morally speaking, impossible to prove; at least, I will venture to pronounce, that no mere repentance can be effectual in consequence of such previous design.

The last, but not the least, test of recovery, which I shall mention, is restitution. Upon the fullest consideration of the matter, it is my judgement, that where restitution is practical, repentance cannot be sincere or effectual without it. In truth, it is only mockery to pretend to repent of our sin, while we keep and enjoy the fruits of it. If we have by mistake, from distress, in haste, or in consequence of disposition and conduct which we now see the guilt of, taken any thing, or withheld any thing from any other person, we must restore what we have so unjustly taken and withheld, or an equivalent,—or it is in vain to talk of repenting of our sin.

I know this is a hard lesson, besides the expense of restitution, which is very much more than we like, or than we can well bear. There is a shame, and confusion, and humiliation in acknowledging our fault, which is one part of the evil. All this I own, and can only say, that if restitution be a duty, it is not less a duty because it is attended with difficulties or disagreeable circumstances.

When once it has been made apparent that a thing is our duty, it is then of no service to prove that it is inconvenient, that it is chargeable, that it is painful. But then restitution may not be practicable. Some injuries are not capable of it. The person entitled to restitution may be dead. We may not have it in our power to make restitution. In such cases we have not this

to exercise. Restitution, like every thing else, is no longer required than while it can be performed. All I mean is, that if it be practicable, it is our duty. Repentance will not avail us without it, and it is no excuse to say that it is unavoidable. I have only farther to observe, that restitution is not merely giving back the property which we unjustly kept, but it is in general the undoing, as far as remains in our power, what we have done wrong, as well as unsaying what we have said wrong. Therefore when, by confessing our mistakes, recanting our falsehoods, exposing our faults, we can put a stop to any bickerings or quarrels we have excited—remove suspicions and irritations which we have infused—call back the evil reports which we have circulated—or, in short, alleviate any how the uneasiness we have occasioned, we are bound to do so. It may produce shame, but it is false shame. It is false shame—but true magnanimity. But whether shame or magnanimity, it is to be, if we would obtain remission from God of our fault through the merits and death of Christ, by means on our part of a hearty, unreserved, unfeigned repentance.

IV.

GOOD FRIDAY.

COLOSSIANS I. 12, 13, 14.

Giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son; in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

IT is observable, in the ordinary course of God's providence, that a variety of ends are sometimes brought about by the same means; and it is not unnatural to expect something of the same contrivance in his extraordinary interpositions. Agreeable to this, the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ was probably subservient to many beneficial purposes to one part or other of the universe, and to more than we can understand. Therefore, I question whether those proceed upon any good authority, who propose one single end and use of the death of Christ, as exclusive of all others, or as the only end designed by it, all other being accidental consequences or figurative applications. The death of Christ is represented as a sacrifice of the same nature, but of superior efficacy, with the Jewish sacrifice of old. Again, it is represented as a price paid for our redemption from sin and death, like the ransom

that is paid when captives are redeemed and set at liberty. Again, it is considered as a martyrdom calculated to testify the truth and sincerity of our Lord's profession. Again, it is an exalted instance of love and affection to mankind; for, although he foresaw all along that this would be the consequence of his undertaking, yet, because he loved us, he would not desist from his ministry, though it cost him his life. It may be again conceived, and is in Scripture conceived, that the death of Christ is a pattern to us of patience and humility, of fortitude and resolution in our benevolent endeavours, and firm constancy against whatever man was able to inflict or threaten. Others, lastly, represent it as the method by which God testified his utter and irreconcilable hatred to sin, which nothing was allowed to expiate but the blood of his own Son, and his love also to his creatures, who gave his own Son to die for our sins. But why might not the death of Christ be all these? There are separate passages of Scripture where each one of these is spoken of as the end and effect of Christ's death; and to suppose that but one of those is the strict and literal account, and that all the rest are to be taken in a figurative or some qualified sense, is bringing great and unnecessary difficulties into the interpretation of Scripture. These ends are all consistent with one another; and it is surely no defect in a scheme, that it serves many purposes at the same time—on the contrary, it affords a striking proof of the wisdom of the contriver; and if he contrive some of them plainly and others figuratively to express what he wants, they may be all equally real ends and equally appropriate: for it is very necessary, in explaining Scripture, to observe, that when a reason, or motive, or end is assigned for a thing, it does not

imply that this is the only reason, or motive, or end, though no other be mentioned possibly in that passage. Thus, in one place of the Old Testament it is said that God would deliver Jerusalem "for his servant David's sake." No other reason is mentioned here; but turn to the prophet Isaiah, and you there find that God would deliver Jerusalem "for mine own name sake and my servant David's sake." God's distinguished indulgence to the house of Israel is described to be sometimes for Jacob's sake, for his ancestor's sake, for God's own name sake, for his truth's sake, for his mercy's sake. All I wish to be observed is, that these reasons are not applicable to one, but are regarded as so many concurring motives and reasons for the same measure. I mean that, in order to give an adequate sense and substance to many passages of Scripture, it is necessary to regard the manner of the writers; and that this regard may be without unfairness extended to the death of Christ.

The various ends of Christ's death may be divided into two kinds—the spiritual and moral. The spiritual consists in the benefit it procured us in the *attainability* of final salvation. The full nature and extent of this benefit, or in what precise way the death of Christ operates to produce it, needs not perhaps be perfectly understood. Reflect how little we know of the laws of nature, as they are called, or the laws and regulations by which the world of spirits is governed; still less of the lives which we shall experience in a world for which we are destined. According to that, the death of Christ may, both in an intelligible and a natural way, have an efficacy in promoting the salvation of human creatures. The *moral* ends of the death of Christ consist in the additional motives which it furnishes to a life of virtue

and religion, as it is a pattern, and example, and encouragement, and incitement to virtue. This last class I propose to make the subject of my present discourse.

It is necessary, in the first place, that nothing I say of this class be construed to exclude the other; for the most probable opinion seems to me to be, that many and different ends were proposed in the death of Christ—all equally real—none of such single importance as to exclude the rest. Now the first great lesson which the death of Christ teaches us is humility—"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." How does this rebuke the pride or inclination to little strifes and distinctions of human life! Shall we be elated with or made great by any petty superiority, which, if real, is but the difference of an artificial make? Shall we take fire, if our dignity be neglected or affronted? Is it so mighty a matter with us to condescend to place ourselves upon a level with our inferiors? Cannot we deign to submit to be poorly thought of in the world? Will not we dispense with one particle of the respect and deference, which we challenge to our rank, or station, or abilities? Do these high and lofty airs become us, miserable dust and ashes, taken at first out of the earth, and ready to sink into it again, when he, who was in the form of God—the express image of his Father—by whom, and for whom, all things are and were made—when he scorned not to divest himself of the glory which he had before

the foundation of the world—and to become of no reputation—to humble himself, even to the death of a malefactor—to bear the taunts, and triumphs, and insults of his enemies—in meek resignation to his Father's will to bow down his sacred head upon the cross. This, indeed, reduces all human pride and power to nothing.

Another virtue, equally conspicuous in this great transaction, and equally useful and wanting for ourselves, is that of *patience* under *disappointed affection.* Do men refuse or pervert our intentions—do they return with resentment what we intended with kindness—are some insensible of our good offices—do they repay with ingratitude or ill usage all attempts to do them good by every turn, and disparage us in the opinion of the world, or try to mortify, and vex, and put us to inconvenience in our affairs, whilst we have given them no provocation, or none that we know of—are others lying in wait to over-reach and impose upon and make a property of our ignorance, to prey upon our easiness of temper—to thrust us by in all the competition of life, to encroach because they perceive our weakness—how is all this to be borne? The Scriptures tell us how. The epistle to the Hebrews has the following passage, "Consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."

A third just application of the sacrifice and death of Christ is to induce us *to crucify the flesh* with the affections and lusts: for shall our salvation be in the sight of God himself of such infinite importance and price, that "he spared not his own Son" in carrying on the great business of our redemption; and shall we refuse, for

the same end, to resign pleasures of a few hours' continuance, or keep within bounds those destructive passions, the gratification of which we know will be our bane and perdition—which commonly begin their torment here, and are certain of it hereafter? Are *we* less to consider our redemption, whose final happiness or misery must all depend upon it, than he who undertook it, and who quitted the clouds of happiness to carry it on? Would you know what is meant by "the flesh with the affections and lusts, which they that are Christ's have crucified?" Saint Paul refers distinctly and circumstantially to all uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings; but neither is this all. There are pleasures and pursuits which are criminal only in the excess, such as diversions, riches, honours, power: these are called the *world;* the immoderate *love* of them is called in Scripture the love of the world. This love in the heart of a Christian is moderated by contemplating on the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, "by whom the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world;" that is, so much more affecting considerations present themselves to our thoughts this way, and on this subject, that diversions, riches, and honours lose their charms—their gaudy lustre fades away before such contemplations, and our attention is drawn to the littlenesses of this generation.

But the great inference which the Scriptures continually press upon us from the sufferings of Christ is, that "if Christ so loved us, we ought also to love one another;" and surely with reason: for is it to be endured, that while the shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep, the flock should be killing and devouring

one another; that while we live under the obligation of this stupendous love; while we are indebted to it for the eternal salvation of our souls, we should cast off all kindness and affection towards one another, or towards any? Christ died that he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad; that he might unite his followers into one body, firmly connected by the same spirit to the same obedience, to the same regulations, by the same love and mutual affection to one another, that they all might be one, even as we are one. How is this gracious design defeated by our treachery and ill intentions towards one another! How little do we judge one another members of the same household, children of the same parent, washed in the same blood, and saved by the death of one Redeemer, when there is any passion to be gratified by oppressing and vexing each other! But are we sensible, you will say, of our obligation to a Saviour of the world? We acknowledge the infinite debt we owe him; we allow all gratitude and all love to be most fully due; how are we to show it? how shall we love Christ, whom we have not seen? "Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?" There is but one way in which we are capable of making any return—the way which he himself has been pleased to point out and declare he will accept—"Forasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." We cannot lay down our lives for him, as he did for us; we cannot pour out our soul a sacrifice for sin—heal human creatures by our stripes, or bear their iniquities; but we can promote peace and good-will, and comfort, and quietness in his family and amongst our brethren. Our influence, it is true, may

be small; it may be little we can do even towards these ends, but we can advance them in our neighbourhood, amongst our acquaintance and our families; and the circle of each man's opportunity, be it great or small, is to him the whole world.

But there is also a second consideration on this matter—that it exalts into dignity and respect; it lifts above insult and contempt the meanest of our fellow Christians: be their outward appearance ever so despicable and forbidding, be their quality what it may, be their age or health ever so infirm, still they are those for whom Christ died. "Destroy not him," says Saint Paul, "by *meats* (only) for whom Christ died;" much more despise not, insult not, overbear not, trample not on, the lowest of our brethren in Christ. However vile they may seem in our eyes, he scrupled not to lay down his life for such.

Finally: as high and low, rich and poor, wise and ignorant, have all one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, let us all pass the short time of our sojourning here in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour. We are members one of another, and of Christ; "wherefore let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking be put away, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you."

V.

GOOD FRIDAY.

ROM. v. 8.

But God commendeth his love towards us, in that whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

THE veneration and devout affection which we entertain for the memory and person of Jesus Christ can never be too great or too ardent, whether we respect what he has suffered for our sakes, or the benefit we draw from his sufferings. If we regard his sufferings, one plain reflection presents itself: "greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend." It is the last and highest possible instance of affection which a parent could show for a beloved child, or any one can show for the dearest relation of human life. If we look to the benefits which the Author of our redemption hath procured to us, *this* is manifest, that all favours and all kindnesses are insignificant, compared with those which affect our eternal welfare in another world; because, in proportion as the happiness of a future life is more important to us than any thing we gain or enjoy in this, so whatever helps or promotes our salvation, our attainment of heaven is more precious than any advantage which can be conferred upon us in this life. We may not be sensible of this now (I fear we are not), but we *shall* be made sensible of it hereafter. The full magnitude and operation of those

effects which will result from the death of Christ we can only comprehend in a general way: that is, we can only comprehend from general expressions used in Scripture. These testify that such effects, and the benefit which the faithful in Christ shall draw from them, will be very great; if we consider that they relate to nothing less than the saving of our souls at the day of judgement, infinitely great in comparison they necessarily must be; because then nothing at all will be of any concern but what relates to that. By the efficacy of his death, surpassing in a great degree our present knowledge, and by his powerful and perpetual intercession for us, which we can in some degree comprehend, we may rest assured that he hath brought into the way to heaven millions who, without him, would not have attained it. If we regard the effects which religious love ought to produce upon us, the love of Christ, like the love of any great benefactor, if it be in our heart, will show itself some way or other. In different men it will show itself in different ways; but in all men it will show itself, if it exist. Such is the nature of the affection. It is never a dead principle. If the root be in the ground, it will irresistibly spring up into action.

There is, however, a danger naturally adhering even to the very piety with which we cherish the memory of our Redeemer, and it is this: It leads sometimes to a frame of mind, and to a habit of thinking concerning religion, and concerning the object of all religion, the Supreme Being himself, which is not justified by reason, or by any thing delivered in the Christian revelation. The opinion which I have in view by this caution is, that whilst we contemplate with deserved admiration the exceeding great love of our Lord and Saviour Jesus

Christ, we slide into a way of considering God the Father as a being of a harsh and austere character, at enmity with mankind; which enmity was to be reconciled by the blood of his Son.

Now I do not so much say that this is irrational, because it may be allowed, perhaps, that human reason is a very imperfect judge of such matters; but it is unscriptural; it is not that representation of the subject which the scriptures exhibit, but the contrary.

For, in the first place I remark, that God is never *said to be reconciled to us, but we to God.* He is always ready to receive mankind returning to their duty. But the difficulty *was to induce* mankind to return. And in this strain run all the texts in which the term "*reconcile*" occurs. "We pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God;" that is, we entreat you, as though Christ himself entreated you, that ye would return to your duty to God. Again, as to be reconciled is to return to their duty, so *reconcile* is to cause to return, or to bring back to duty and obedience those who had deserted; both which I apprehend to be the sense of the term in the following texts. "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and having made peace through the blood of his cross, *by him to reconcile* all things unto himself, by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven; and you that were *sometimes* alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, now hath he reconciled." Col. i. 20. Again, Eph. xi. 15, St. Paul, speaking of the Jews and Gentiles, declares "That Christ hath now by his death abolished all distinction between them; that having made of twain one new man, he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross;" so in other places, God is said *to*

reconcile us to himself by Jesus Christ: to be *reconciling the world* unto himself. The preaching of the Gospel is called *the word and the ministry of reconciliation.* The same distinction holds concerning some other phrases which occur in the writing of the Apostles. God is never said to be *at enmity with us,* or an *enemy to us,* or *alienated from us,* but we are said to be *at enmity with God, enemies to God, alienated from God;* and *all* by the wickedness of our lives. "A friend of the world," saith St. James, "is an enemy of God." "You that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works;" so the Gentiles were said to be alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that was in them.

I proceed, in the second place, to prove, that the redemption of the world, instead of being undertaken by another, to appease the wrath of an incensed or austere God, was itself a thing provided by God; and was the effect of *his* care and goodness towards his human creatures. The texts I shall lay before you, in support of this proposition, are the following: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John iii. 16. Again, in the 6th chapter of the same Gospel, Christ speaks, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me; and this is the Father's will who hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing." These are Christ's own words; and in what way does Christ describe his office and commission? Not as coming of himself to pacify God the Father, who was alienated from and averse to the race of mankind, but as sent by God the Father to reclaim and reform this degenerate race—to save them,

by turning every one from his sins, and so to bring those back who were gone far astray from their duty, their happiness, and their God; in other words, Christ's coming was the appointment of God the Father, and that appointment was the effect of God the Father's love. These declarations of our Saviour's own are followed up by many passages in the writings of the Apostles, which speak of Christ's coming into the world, of his ministry, and more especially of his death, as concerted and determined of old in the councils of the Almighty Father. "Him being delivered," saith St. Peter, "by the determinate councils and foreknowledge of *God* ye have taken." "Against the holy child Jesus they were gathered together, for to do whatsoever *thy* hand and *thy* council determined to be done." But the mission of Christ was not only the counsel and design of God the Father, but it was a counsel of supreme love to mankind. "God commendeth his love towards us, in that whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also give us all things?" But the text the fullest and the plainest to our purpose is in the fourth chapter of the epistle to St. John. "In this was manifest the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live *through* him." "Herein is love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Now in these various texts you will remark the same thing, which is, that they do not describe the redemption of mankind, as if a milder and more benevolent being went about to propitiate the favour of another who was harsh and austere, who was before incensed at the human race, had cast them off, or was

averse to their welfare (that certainly was not the idea which dwelt in the mind of those who delivered such declarations as I have now read to you); but it was all along the design and the doing of that being—the effect of his love, the fruit and manifestation of his affection and good-will.

But it will be asked, if God the Father was always gracious, and merciful, and loving to his creatures; always ready to receive, and desirous to make them happy, what necessity was there for a redeemer, or for the redemption of the world at all? I answer that there was still the same necessity to reform and recover mankind from their sins, and there was likewise a necessity for a propitiation for sin. It was a law of God's moral government, that mankind could not be made happy in their future existence without *holiness*, at least without endeavours after holiness, without turning away from their sins, without a pardon obtained through Jesus Christ his Son. Perhaps the whole rational universe, angels as well as the spirits of departed men, may be interested in the maintenance and preservation of this law. Here God's love to his creatures interposed—not to break through or suspend a rule universally salutary and necessary, but to provide expedients, and to endeavour (if we may so say) to bring the human race, lost in an *almost total depravity*, within the rule which he had appointed for the government of his moral creation. The expedient which his wisdom made choice of, and which it is for us to accept with all humility and all thankfulness, was to send into the world the person nearest and dearest to himself, his own and his only begotten Son, to instruct the ignorance of mankind, to collect a society of men out of all nations and countries of the world, united together by

faith in him, and through the influence of that faith, producing the fruits of righteousness and of good works. It seemed agreeable, also, to the same supreme wisdom, that this divine messenger should sacrifice his life in the execution of his office. The expediency of this measure we can in part understand, because we can see that it conduced with other causes to fix a deep impression on the hearts and consciences, both of his immediate followers, the living witnesses and spectators of his death and sufferings, and of those who, in after ages, might come to a knowledge of his history. It bound them to him by the tenderest of all reflections, that he died for their sakes. This is one intelligible use of the death of Christ. But we are not to stop at this: in various declarations of Scripture concerning the death of Christ, it is necessary also to acknowledge that there are other and higher consequences attendant upon this event: the particular nature of which consequences, though of the most real and highest nature, we do not understand, nor perhaps are capable of understanding, even if it had been told us, until we be admitted to more knowledge than we at present possess of the order and economy of superior beings, of our own state and destination after death, and of the laws of nature by which the next world will be governed, which probably are very different from the present. But that there are such benefits arising from the death of Christ various passages of Scripture declare, and cannot be fairly interpreted without supposing them. We are sure that the whole was a wise method of accomplishing the end proposed, because it was the method adopted by the wisest of all beings. Perhaps it was the only method possible; but what I am at present concerned to point out is, that it is to be re-

ferred to the love of God the Father. It is to be regarded as an instance, and the very highest instance, of his paternal affection for us. You have heard, in the several texts which I have read to you, that it was so regarded and so acknowledged by our Lord himself, and by his Apostles.

What remains, therefore, but that, whilst we cherish in our remembrance and our hearts a lively sense of gratitude towards the divine person, who was the visible agent, the great and patient sufferer, in carrying on the redemption of the world, we look also to the source and origin of this, as of every blessing which we enjoy, the love and tender mercies of God the Father. "Blessed therefore be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, to the praise of his glory in Christ, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."

VI.

EASTER-DAY.

1 Cor. xv. 3—9.

I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures; and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once—of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that he was seen of James; then of all the apostles; and last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time: for I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Amongst the various testimonies that have come down to us of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and which, by consequence, ensure to us the hope of our own, no one possesses greater evidence, or carries with it stronger credentials of truth and authenticity, than that which is contained in the words which I have read to you.

I shall employ the present solemn, and surely if any ever was so, this joyful occasion, first, in laying before you such remarks and explanations as the words themselves may seem to suggest; and secondly, in addressing

you concerning the author and authority from which they proceed.

Saint Paul, previously to his writing this letter to the Christians of Corinth, had himself been in that city preaching the Gospel amongst them in person.

Those to whom he now writes, whilst he was absent upon the same business in another country, were they whom he had some time before taught face to face; and most of them persons who had been moved by that his teaching to embrace the new faith. After having finished some occasional subjects which he was led to treat of in the epistle, he proceeds, as was indeed natural, to bring to their remembrance the great topics which he had set forth amongst them when he appeared at Corinth as an apostle of Jesus Christ.—"I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain." He then introduces that short but clear abstract of the fundamental part of his doctrine, which composes our present text; and he introduces it with this remarkable preface: —"I delivered unto you *first of all*." This was the first thing I taught you—intimating that this is the fundamental and great essential of the Christian system. In correspondence with which declaration you will find that the fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead, and what appeared to be, and what is, a plain and undisputed inference from it, that God will fulfil his promise by raising up us also at the last day, were in reality the articles of information to mankind which the apostles carried with them wherever they went; what they first disclosed to their converts, as the groundwork of all their addresses, as the cause and business of

their coming amongst them, as the sum indeed and substance of what they were bound to deliver, or their disciples to believe. In proof of this, I desire it to be particularly remarked, that when the apostles, at Peter's suggestion, chose out from the followers of Christ a new apostle in the place of Judas, the great qualification insisted upon in that choice was that he should be one who had accompanied the other apostles at the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out amongst them, that he might be, together with them, a witness of his resurrection. This circumstance shows that what they regarded as the proper office and business of an apostle was, to testify to the world from their own knowledge, and the evidence of their own senses, that he whom they preached had died, been buried, and was raised up again from the dead. After this transaction, the first preaching of Christianity to the public at large, to those, I mean, who had not professed themselves the followers of Christ during his lifetime, was after the descent of the Holy Ghost, upon the day of Pentecost. Upon this occasion, in the presence of a great multitude who had then resorted to Jerusalem from all quarters of the world, whom the noise of this miracle had gathered together, Saint Peter, with the rest of the apostles standing about him, delivered a discourse, of which the sum and substance was briefly this—"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." The same thing may be observed of two discourses held at Jerusalem by Saint Peter a short time afterwards: one upon curing the lame man at the gate of the Temple; the other upon his miraculous deliverance from prison. Christ's resurrection from the dead, and the solemn attestation of the fact, was the theme and subject of both discourses. Follow the apostles to any

new place in which their discourses are recorded, and you will find this same thing the stress and constant burthen of their preaching. When Peter was called in so remarkable a manner to open the knowledge of the Gospel to Cornelius and his friends, the intelligence with which he gratified the eager expectation of his audience was this brief but surprising history—"Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead." When Paul and Barnabas, a short time afterwards, had been solemnly appointed to carry the Gospel to the Gentiles, and for that purpose had set out upon a progress through the Lesser Asia, the most populous and frequented country of the East, the first public address which Saint Paul is recorded to have delivered was at Antioch in Pisidia, of which this was the message—"We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again."

After much journeying from place to place, for the purpose of diffusing wherever he went the Christian faith, we find his travels at length brought him to Athens, at that time the metropolis, in some measure, of science and learning. We cannot help being curious to know what the apostle would say there; how he would first unfold his extraordinary message to an audience of philosophers. Accordingly his speech upon this remarkable occasion is preserved; in which he first reminds them of the great topics of natural religion, (which we at this day call the unity, omniscience, omnipotence, and infinity or ubiquity of God), all which their own researches might have taught them;

and then proceeds to disclose that which was the proper business of his preaching, the great revelation which he was going about the world to communicate:—"God now commandeth all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed him a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he raised him from the dead."

Whenever a set speech of the apostle's at a new place is recorded, that is, whenever he first opens the great affair of Christianity to strangers (and not where he is addressing those who have been before instructed), the great argument of his discourse is the resurrection; and therefore we are authorised to conclude in those other places where his speeches are not particularly given, that to preach the Gospel, to preach Jesus, to preach the word,—which they are said to have done wherever they came,—meant the advancing of the great fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead, and the decisive proof which they considered it as affording of a general resurrection at the last day. It was in perfect conformity, therefore, with Saint Paul's practice, as well as with that of the rest of the apostles, that he reminds the Corinthians of his having declared to them this doctrine *first of all*. His ministry amongst them began with it; as not only the most important, but the corner-stone and foundation of all the rest.

But secondly, the apostle tells the Corinthians that he had delivered to them what he himself had received. Saint Paul's knowledge of the Gospel came to him in a manner perfectly peculiar. "I neither," says he, in his epistle to the Galatians, "received it of man, neither was I taught it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

It does not, I think, appear that Saint Paul, like the other apostles, knew Christ during his lifetime, or that he had ever seen him. The necessary information concerning this great transaction was imparted to him by inspiration, at the time probably that he was miraculously converted. He was assured that it was not an illusion which played upon his fancy, because he was assured of a real public external miracle, which accompanied the reception of this knowledge.

But whatever certainty a divine communication might convey to himself, he was very sensible that it was not the most direct and satisfactory proof to others of a matter of fact, which was capable of being attested by the evidence of men's senses. He therefore does not rest the point upon the communication which *he* had received, but appeals to what was less questionable by others—the testimony of those who had conversed with Jesus after his resurrection, in the ordinary and natural way of human perception. His account of the matter is very full and circumstantial:—"He was seen of Cephas (which was the name, you remember, that Christ had given to Peter), then of the twelve; after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that he was seen of James, then of all the apostles." These words are very memorable. A fairer, a more public or candid appeal to the evidence of a fact was never made. Not content with saying in general terms, that he was seen of many; that he was seen of his disciples; he gives the names of two eminent brethren who saw him—men both perfectly well known by reputation, at least, and to many, it is probable, personally known in the several churches of

Christians: and not only so, but men living at the time. He names Peter; to whose history and character they could be no strangers. He mentions James; at that time presiding over the church in Jerusalem. He names the twelve; all well known, by fame, at least, and report, to every Christian convert: and then he refers to "above five hundred brethren who saw him at one time, of whom the greater part remain unto this present;" that is, were upon the spot, being witnesses of the fact at the time the epistle was written. He proceeds, in the last place, with great humility to state his own personal assurance of the same fact, by telling them, that—not then, indeed, but some time afterwards—Christ was seen of *him* also. He alludes, no doubt, to Christ's appearing to him at his conversion, upon his road to Damascus. Accounting, as he well might, the ocular manifestation of Christ raised from the dead as one of the greatest favours that could be vouchsafed, he observes, that whilst all the other apostles were indulged with this satisfaction during Christ's abode upon earth, it was not granted to him until some considerable time afterwards.

This difference, he acknowledges, was no more than just and due; inasmuch as he had rendered himself unworthy of the name and character of an apostle; not simply by being an unbeliever in Christ's word, but by going about with a furious and mistaken zeal to persecute all who called upon his name; "last of all, he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time, who am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

What is necessary to remark concerning the separate clauses of the text is in a little compass. Saint Paul

says that Christ died for our sins, *according to the Scriptures.* The Scriptures here meant were the prophecies of the Old Testament, which describe the future history of Christ. One of these, amongst many which are more indirect, speaks the circumstance of Christ dying for our sins so plainly, that Saint Paul probably had it now in his thoughts—"He was wounded for our transgression, he was bruised for our iniquity; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." This you read in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, written seven hundred years before Christ appeared.

Our apostle proceeds: "and that he was buried, and rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures." The circumstance of his burial is particularly noticed in the same prophecy; which gave occasion probably to Saint Paul's mention of it in this place. "He made," saith Isaiah, "his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death." The more important fact of his resurrection is both set forth by necessary implication in Isaiah's prophecy; for he says of Christ, "when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days;" and was also understood by the apostles to be represented by those words of the sixteenth Psalm, in which David, speaking as they interpreted it, in the person of the Messiah, says, "Thou shalt not leave my soul in hell, nor wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption."

The apostle then, in order to establish the reality of Christ's resurrection, enumerates several of his appearances after it. And in comparing this account with the other accounts of Christ's appearance given in the Gospels, we are carefully to remember that none of

them undertook or intended to describe all the occasions or all the instances in which Christ was seen. Christ appeared on various occasions; and one history relates what passed upon one occasion, and another what passed upon a different occasion. This produces, as might be expected, considerable variation in the accounts, yet without contradiction or inconsistency. "He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve." This exactly agrees with Luke's narrative: "Then the eleven were gathered together, saying the Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." After this, Saint Paul tells us, "he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once." This number is not specified in any of the Gospels; nevertheless, there is nothing to hinder us from supposing this number might be present at some of the appearances recorded in these Gospels. It is generally supposed to have been at his solemn predicted appearance upon the mountain in Galilee. One circumstance is common to all the different accounts of the resurrection; namely, that he appeared to none but his disciples: and however the unbelieving Jews might cavil at this circumstance at the time, I think the fair and explicit mention of it is to us at this day a strong confirmation of the truth of the history. It manifests the candour and exactness of the historians. Had they thought themselves at liberty to carve and mould the account, so as to make it pass most plausible and current with the public; had they not conceived of themselves as relating the truth, they could as easily have stated of Christ, that he was seen indiscriminately by all, as have confessed, (which they have done), that his appearance was confined to his own followers. We may not at this time know the exact reasons which determined our blessed Lord to make the distinction. It is enough

to know that Peter and James, and the eleven apostles, and the Galilean women, and the five hundred brethren, were abundantly sufficient to testify a fact of which they could not be mistaken.

Having observed thus much upon the terms in which Saint Paul delivers his testimony to the resurrection of Christ, it remains in the next place to consider the authority and weight of the testimony itself. Here then, we see a man of learning and education; amongst the first of his countrymen in activity, eloquence, and ability; hardly equalled by any other, as appears, not by any commendations bestowed upon him by those of his own persuasion, but from his writings, which are now in our hands:—we have this man, after being distinguished in the early part of his life by his fierce and eager persecution of the Christian name, now spending his whole time in travelling from country to country, from city to city throughout the most civilized and populous region of the world, to announce wherever he came this important intelligence; that Jesus Christ, a man sent by God into the world for the instruction and salvation of mankind, after having been executed by the Jews as a malefactor, was publicly raised from the dead; that he himself had seen him after his resurrection; that many others, whom he names, to whom he appeals, and with whom he conversed and associated, had done the same: that in consequence of this stupendous event, they were each one to look for his own resurrection at the last day; that they were to conduct and prepare themselves accordingly. See this man in the prosecution of his purpose, enduring every hardship, encountering every danger, sacrificing his pleasures, his ease, his safety, in order to bring men to the knowledge of this fact, and, by virtue

of that knowledge, to the practice of holiness. Now this is the question, Hath ever any falsehood been supported by testimony like this?

Falsehoods, we confess, have found their way into conversation, into tradition, into books: but is an example to be produced of a man voluntarily undertaking a life of pain, of toil, of ignominy, of incessant fatigue, of continual peril, of want, of hardship, submitting to the loss of home, of country, of friends—to stripes and stoning, to imprisonment and death; for the sake of carrying about a story of what was false, and of what, if false, he must have known to be so?

What then shall we say to these things? If it be true that Christ is risen, then undoubtedly it is true that we shall live again in a new state.

Christ, we are told, "hath abolished death," yet men still die. What, then, is the change whereof we boast? Death is so different a thing, according as it is regarded as the destruction of our existence, or only as a transition to some other stage of it; that, when revelation affords us solid ground for viewing it in this latter aspect, death is said by that revelation to be abolished, to be done away, to reign—to exist—no more.

Still farther; if it be not only by the intervention of Christ that the knowledge of this is discovered to mankind, but by his power and agency that the thing itself is effected; if it be his mighty working, which is to change our vile bodies, which is to produce the great renovation that we look for; then is it more literally and strictly true, that by death he hath destroyed him that hath the power of death.

"Men (saith the epistle to the Hebrews), through the fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage:" and well they might! It held them in

constant terror; it was a fixed load upon the spirits; it damped the satisfaction, it exasperated the miseries of life. From that bondage we are delivered. New hopes are inspired, new prospects are unfolded; the virtuous enjoyments of life we possess here—an exceeding and eternal weight of glory we expect hereafter. Are we prosperous and fortunate? Instead of beholding the period of human prosperity with perpetual dread, we have it in our power to make it the commencement of a new series of never-failing pleasures, of purer and better joys. Does the hand of adversity lie heavy upon us? we see before us a reward in heaven for patience, for submission, for trials, for sufferings; and, what is still more important, what is infinitely so—when that hour which is coming shall come, when we find the enjoyments of life slipping from under us, when we feel ourselves loosening from the world, and infirmity and decay gathering fast around us, we have then an anchor of hope, a rock of confidence, a place of refuge: we are then able to commit our souls to the custody of a faithful Creator, knowing, as Saint Paul speaks, in whom we have believed; being persuaded that he is able to keep that which we commit unto him against that day. We shall rise again: but unto what? They that have done good, to the resurrection of life; they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation. How tremendous is the alternative; what an event, what a prospect is this to look forward to! If all this be true; if the hour of judgement will certainly come to pass; what manner of men, as the apostle asks, ought we to be—what manner of lives ought we to lead, seeing, as he expresses it, we have such a cloud of witnesses, such a hope, such a notice and revelation of the things which will befall us! Is it possible that these things

can ever be out of our thoughts? Is it possible that being there they can allow us to sin? He is gone up on high, he hath led captivity captive: he is in glory. Hear what the angels said to the astonished apostles: "In like manner as ye see him ascend up into heaven, ye shall see him come down again from heaven. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" but oh! mayest thou find us in some degree prepared; not indeed to await the severity of thy justice, but to be made objects of thy mercy: prepared by penitence and humility, by prayer, by a desire and study to learn thy will; by what is still more, the return and conversion of our hearts to thee, manifested by a quick and constant fear of offending; by a love of thy laws, thy name, thy Scriptures, thy religion; by sincere, though interrupted, it is to be feared, and imperfect, yet by sincere endeavours to obey thy universal will.

VII.

EASTER-DAY.

Acts xiii. 29, 30, 31.

And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre: but God raised him from the dead; and he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are witnesses unto this people.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was on this wise. He had frequently, during the course of his ministry, foretold his own resurrection on the third day from his death—sometimes in parables, sometimes in plain terms. In parables, as when, pointing to his body, he said to the Jews, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again;" and upon another occasion, "No sign shall be given you but the sign of the prophet Jonas; for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

At other times he foretold the same thing in direct terms: "While they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, the son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men, and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again." And at various other times he declared thus to his disciples.

The Jews, who had come to the knowledge of this declaration, did not, I suppose, give any credit to it, but thought that it might put it into the heads of his disciples to attempt the stealing of his body out of the grave, in order to give colour to the report that he was risen as he had foretold. With this story the chief priests and pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said whilst he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again; command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, he is risen from the dead." Pilate, upon this application, which probably he judged a very unnecessary caution, ordered them to close up and seal the door of the sepulchre, and place a guard to watch it.

With respect to the apostles and disciples themselves, they hardly seem to have known what to make of it. They scarcely believed or understood our Lord when he had talked of rising from the dead. The truth is, they retained to the last the notion which both they and all the Jews held, that the true Christ, when he appeared, would set up an empire upon earth, and make the Jews the masters of the world. Now when, by his death, they saw an end put to all such expectations, they were totally at a loss what to think. "We trusted," said one, then in a sort of despair of the cause, "that it had been he who should have redeemed Israel;" that is, from the bondage their country was then in to the Roman people.

Yet these despairing reflections were mixed with some kind of confused notion that all was not yet over. "Besides all this," said the same disciple, "to-day is the third day since these things were done;" which

shows that they bore in mind something that he had said of his rising the third day. In this situation of the affair, the Jews feared nothing but that his disciples should steal the body. His disciples, disheartened and perplexed—at a loss what to do, or what they were to look for next—in this disposition, I say, of all parties, mark what came to pass. Some women, early in the morning as of this day, went to the sepulchre with no other intention than to embalm the body with some spices they had prepared, when, to their astonishment and surprise, they found the guards fallen down in fright, the sepulchre open, the body gone, and the clothes it was wrapped in left in their place. They ran back, as was natural, to give his disciples this strange account. Peter and John, the two first they met with, hastened instantly to the sepulchre, and in the mean time, Jesus himself appeared to them; first to the women, then to two of the disciples, then to the eleven apostles all together; afterwards, upon different occasions, to the apostles and other disciples on the evening of the fourth day after his resurrection; and upon one occasion, as St. Paul relates, "to five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part," says he, "remain to this present," *i.e.* are still living. In one of these appearances he upbraided them, as well he might, for their unbelief and hardness of heart, in not believing those who made the report of his resurrection, and had first seen him after he was risen. On another occasion he bade them handle his body, that they might be convinced it was not, as they had suspected, a spirit which they saw; "for a spirit hath not," says he, "flesh and bones as ye see me have." At other times he was still more circumstantial. Thomas, one of the apostles, happened, it seems, to be absent when he first

appeared to the disciples assembled together; and though they all assured him they had seen the Lord, so incredulous was he, that he declared, unless he saw him himself, and not only saw him, but also felt and examined the very marks of the wounds which were given him upon the cross, he would not be convinced. It pleased Christ, for the satisfaction of those who came after, to indulge Thomas in this demand; and when he appeared unto them at their next meeting, he called Thomas to him: "Reach hither," says he, "thy finger, and behold my hands, and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing."

You need not be told that, after forty days, during which time he occasionally appeared to his disciples, he was, in the sight of the eleven apostles (for the twelfth was Judas the traitor), lifted up into heaven, and the clouds received him out of their sight. It will be proper to return and take notice of the conduct of the Jews upon this occasion. The watch, which they had placed to guard the sepulchre, came into the city and showed to the chief priests the things that were done. "When they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, say ye, his disciples came by night and stole him away; and if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him and secure you." So they took the money, and did as they were taught; "and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews," says Matthew, "unto this day."

Now there are some marks of truth in this relation, which, though both obvious and considerable, may perhaps escape you, if you have not heard them mentioned.

There are, you will perceive, if you read the narra-

tive some variations in the accounts of the evangelists, principally arising from one history relating one circumstance, and another, another, when, in truth, both circumstances took place. For example, Christ appeared at many different times. St. Matthew relates what passed at one appearance, St. Luke at another, St. John at a third; and so it must needs happen that their relations will be different, though not at all contradictory. But what, after all, do these variations, or, if you will, inconsistencies, prove? Why, they prove to demonstration, that the writers of the Gospel did not combine or lay their heads together to fill up a story for the public, but that each wrote according to his memory, information, and judgement, without any scheme or contrivance amongst themselves to make their stories tally and correspond. There are always variations, and often contradictions, where witnesses are without communication and independent of one another, and if there be not, it conveys a strong surmise that they are prepared with a made-up story, constructed and connected amongst themselves beforehand. It is not said, you may likewise remember, that Christ appeared after his resurrection to any but his own disciples. Unbelievers, Jews especially, lay hold of this circumstance. He ought, (for so they speak,) to have appeared openly to the Jews, to enemies as well as friends. His confining his appearances to his friends and followers is, as they would intimate, suspicious. Now what were Christ's reasons for refusing his appearance to the unbelieving Jews we may not know. It is just like inquiring why he did not come down from the cross when they called upon him to do so. It might be fitting to withhold this last proof from those who had so shamefully and obstinately resisted and

abused every other proof he had given in evidence of the resurrection, and might be designed for the instruction, comfort, and support of his followers, to whom it was necessary (for they could not stir a step without it), rather than for the conviction of the unbelieving Jews, inhabitants of Jerusalem, who had abundant evidence before, if they would have attended to it. And then, whether this was the reason, or whatever was the reason, it proves the sincerity and candour of the four evangelists, who have given the history. They would have said that Christ appeared to the Jews; and, had they thought themselves at liberty to have carved the story as they pleased, in order to make it plausible and probable, no doubt they would have said so. The objection that would be made to their present accounts was obvious; and nothing but a strict adherence to truth, and disposition to relate them honestly as they were, whether they made for them or against them, would have induced them to lay themselves open to their objection. Forgeries of all kinds take care to guard against objection; and we are apt to overdo it with cautious exactness.

With respect to the resurrection itself, as I have collected it briefly out of the four evangelists, you will observe, in the first place, that Christ had publicly foretold his own resurrection at the precise time of it—the third day from his death. This he would not have done, had any imposition been intended, because it was giving the public notice to be upon their guard, and look to themselves that they were not imposed upon. It *had* also this effect, for they did accordingly take such precautions as they thought most secure. Then, foretelling of his resurrection must likewise have ruined his cause for ever, if it had not actually come to pass.

Not very many years ago, there appeared in this country a set of bold and wild enthusiasts called French prophets. They found means to draw after them a considerable party, till at length they had the confidence to give out that one of their teachers should, at a certain time and place, publicly rise from the dead. The time and place being thus known beforehand, many of all sorts attended. What was the effect? No resurrection being actually accomplished, they and their prophecies were blasted together. And the same thing must have happened to Christ and his followers, had he had not actually risen; for the two cases are in this respect pretty parallel.

Another way of considering this history is this. I think it manifest that the body of Jesus was missing out of the sepulchre. Thus much may be taken for granted, not merely on the credit of the Gospels, but from the nature of the transaction. It is certain, and allowed by all, that the followers of Christ did, after his death, fully preach and assert that he was risen from the dead, and this they did at Jerusalem. Now if the Jews had the dead body of Jesus to produce, while his disciples were preaching that he was risen from the dead, how ready and complete a refutation would it have been of all their pretensions! It must have exposed them in a moment to the derision and scorn of all who heard them.

This being so, we may be very sure that the Jews had not the body forthcoming, as there cannot be a doubt but they would have made this use of it if they could have found it. Allowing, then, the body to be missing, the next question seems to be, whether it was stolen away, as the Jews pretended, by his disciples, or miraculously raised out of the sepulchre, as we maintain.

The Jewish story, if you attend to it, is charged with numerous absurdities and improbability. The watch gave out that, while they slept, the disciples stole the body. This watch were Roman soldiers, remarkable for their military discipline and strictness. For a Roman soldier to sleep upon his post was punished, we know, with death. Is it credible, that they should sleep—all of them at this particular time—the third day after his death of all other times? The story carries improbability upon the face of it. Nor is it more likely that the disciples of Christ, dispirited and discouraged by their master's fate, should think of such an attempt as stealing away the body—an attempt likely to be soon detected, and which, if detected, was sure to ruin and confound them for ever. Could they expect to find the guards asleep? Could they hope to escape the vigilance of those who were to answer for it with their lives? Now by the same rule that the Jewish story of the body's being stolen is improbable, the apostles' account of its being raised from the dead is probable, because missing out of the sepulchre it certainly was; and if it could not be conveyed away by actual means, it must have been removed by a miracle. I thought this circumstance fit to be attended to in confirmation of the apostles' testimony; though, to say the truth, the testimony of the apostles to the resurrection of Christ needs neither this nor any other circumstance to confirm it; for where men lay down their lives, as many of them did, in support of an assertion which they must know whether it was true or false, it was an unaccountable piece of misplaced incredulity not to believe.

In reading the New Testament, especially the Acts

of the Apostles, you must have observed what a great stress the apostles in their preaching laid upon the fact of the resurrection: more, by much, than upon any other miracle Christ wrought, or indeed than all. When they chose a successor in the place of Judas, it was to be one, as St. Peter says, to be witness with him of his resurrection. This also was what Peter rested upon in his first and second discourse to the Jews, and in his preaching to Cornelius; and there is reason to believe that it was what he bore with him, and laid the main stress upon, wherever he went.

In like manner, Paul, at Antioch and Athens, and some other places, delivers long discourses to the people, of which, however, the resurrection of Christ was the burthen and substance; and that this was his custom, may be collected from what he writes to the Corinthians. "I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day." The reason of which was, that they considered the resurrection of Christ as a direct and decisive proof of their own resurrection at the last day. Without doubt if it pleased God willingly to give mankind the plainest possible argument of his intention to raise them up at the last, we cannot imagine any more satisfactory than his raising up a dead man before their eyes. St. Paul was so struck with this proof, that he thought no man could resist. "If Christ be risen, how then say some among you" (that is, how are any among you so absurd as to say), "there is no resurrection?"

Let us lay these things to heart. If Christ be risen, of which we have proof that cannot deceive us, then

most certainly will the day arrive when all that are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth. We shall arise indeed—but to what? "They that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, but glory, honour, and peace to every one that worketh good."

VIII.

THE AGENCY OF JESUS CHRIST SINCE HIS ASCENSION.

HEBREWS XIII. 8.

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

THE assertion of the text might be supported by the consideration, that the mission and preaching of Christ have lost nothing of their truth and importance by the lapse of ages, which has taken place since his appearance in the world. If they seem of less magnitude, reality, and concern to us at this present day, than they did to those who lived in the days in which they were carried on, it is only in the same manner as a mountain or a tower appears to be less, when seen at a distance. It is a delusion in both cases. In natural objects we have commonly strength enough of judgement to prevent our being imposed upon by these false appearances; and it is not so much a want or defect of, as it is a neglecting to exert and use, our judgement, if we suffer ourselves to be deceived by them in religion. Distance of space in one case, and distance of time in the other, make no difference in the real nature of the object; and it is a great weakness to allow them to make any difference in our estimate and apprehension. The death of Jesus Christ is, in truth, as interesting to *us*, as it was to those who stood by his cross: his resur-

rection from the grave is a pledge and assurance of *our* future resurrection, no less than it was of theirs who conversed, who eat and drank with him, after his return to life.

But there is another sense, in which it is still more materially true, "that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." He is personally living, and acting in the same manner; has been so all along, and will be so to the end of the world. He is the same in his person, in his power, in his office.

First, I say that he is the same individual person, and is at this present time existing, living, acting. He is gone up on high. The clouds, at his ascension, received him out of human sight. But whither did he go? To sit for ever at the right hand of God. This is expressly declared concerning him. It is also declared of him, that death hath no more dominion over him, that he is no more to return to corruption. So that, since his ascension, he hath continued in heaven to live and act. His human body, we are likewise given to believe, was changed upon his ascension, that is, was glorified, whereby it became fitted for heaven, and fitted for immortality; no longer liable to decay or age, but thenceforward remaining literally and strictly the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. This change in the human person of Christ is in effect asserted, or rather is referred to, as a thing already known, in that text of St. Paul's epistle to the Philippians, wherein we are assured, that hereafter Christ shall change our vile body, that it may be like his glorious body. Now, the natural body of Christ, before his resurrection at least, was like the natural body of other men; was not a glorious body. At this time, therefore, when St. Paul calls it his glorious body (for it was after his ascension

that St. Paul wrote these words), it must have undergone a great change. In this exalted and glorified state our Lord was seen by St. Stephen, in the moment of his martyrdom. Being full, you read, of the Holy Ghost, Stephen looked up steadfastly unto heaven, and saw the glory of God*, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. At that seemingly dreadful moment, even when the martyr was surrounded by a band of assassins, with stones ready in their hands to stone him to death, the spectacle, nevertheless, filled his soul with rapture. He cried out in ecstacy, "Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." The same glorious vision was vouchsafed to St. Paul, at his conversion; and to St. John, at the delivery of the Revelations. This change of our Lord's body was a change, we have reason to believe, of nature and substance, so as to be thenceforward incapable of decay or dissolution. It might be susceptible of any external form, which the particular purpose of his appearance should require. So when he appeared to Stephen and Paul, or to any of his saints, it was necessary he should assume the form which he had borne in the flesh, that he might be known to them. But it is not necessary to suppose that he was confined to that form. The contrary rather appears in the revelation of St. John, in which, after once showing himself to the apostle, our Lord was afterwards represented to his eyes under different forms. All, however, that is of importance to us to know, all that belongs to our present subject to observe, is, that Christ's glorified person was incapable of

* The "glory of God," in Scripture, when spoken of as an object of vision, always, I think, means a luminous appearance, bright and refulgent, beyond the splendour of any natural object whatever.

dying any more; that it continues at this day; that it hath all along continued the same real, identical being, as that which went up into heaven in the sight of his apostles; the same essential nature, the same glorified substance, the same proper person.

But, secondly, he is the same also in power. The Scripture doctrine concerning our Lord seems to be this; that, when his appointed commission and his sufferings were closed upon earth, he was advanced in heaven to a still higher state than what he possessed before he came into the world*. This point, as well as the glory of his nature, both before and after his appearance in the flesh, is attested by St. Paul, in the second chapter of his epistle to the Philippians. "Being in the form of God, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God." He did not affect to be equal with God, or to appear with divine honours (for such is the sense which the words in the original will bear), "but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore," *i. e.* for this his obedience even to the last extremity, even unto death, "God also hath highly exalted him;" or, as it is distinctly and perspicuously expressed in the original, "God also hath *more* highly exalted him," that is, to a higher state than what he even before possessed; insomuch that he hath "given him a name which is above every name: that *at*," or, more properly, *in*, "the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord,

* See Sherlock's sermon on Phil. ii. 9.

to the glory of God the Father:" exactly agreeable to what our Lord himself declared to his disciples after his resurrection. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in the earth:" Matt. xxviii. 18. You will observe, in this passage of St. Paul, not only the magnificent terms in which Christ's exaltation is described, viz. "that every knee should thenceforward bow in his name, and that every tongue should confess him to be Lord;" but you will observe, also, the comprehension and extent of his dominion, "of things in heaven, of things on earth, of things under the earth." And that we are specifically comprised under this authority and this agency, either of the two following texts may be brought as a sufficient proof: "Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of you;" Matt. xviii. 20, which words of our Lord imply a knowledge of, an observation of, an attention to, and an interference with, what passes amongst his disciples upon earth. Or take his final words to his followers, as recorded by St. Matthew: "Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world," and they carry the same implication. And, lastly, that, in the most awful scene and event of our existence, the day of judgement, we shall not only become the objects, but the immediate objects of Christ's power and agency, is set forth in two clear and positive texts: "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God," John v. 25; not the voice of God, but the voice of the Son of God. And then, pursuing the description of what will afterwards take place, our Lord adds, in the next verse but one, "that the Father hath given him authority to execute judgement also, because he is the Son of Man:" which is in perfect conformity with what St. Paul announced to the Athe-

nians, as a great and new doctrine, namely, "that God hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained: whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

Having shown that the power of Jesus Christ is a subsisting power at this time, the next question is, as to its duration. Now, so far as it respects mankind in this present world, we are assured that it shall continue until the end of the world. Some of the texts, which have been adduced, prove this point, as well as that for which they were quoted; and they are confirmed by St. Paul's declaration, 1 Cor. xv. 24. "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father:" therefore he shall retain and exercise it until *then*. But farther, this power is not only perpetual, but progressive; advancing and proceeding by different steps and degrees, until it shall become supreme and complete, and shall prevail against every enemy and every opposition. That our Lord's dominion will not only remain unto the end of the world, but that its effects in the world will be greatly enlarged and increased, is signified very expressly in the second chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The apostle in this passage applies to our Lord a quotation from the Psalms: "Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet:" and then draws from it a strict inference: "For in that he put all things in subjection under him, he left nothing that he did not put under him." And then he remarks, as a fact, "But now we see *not yet* all things put under him:" that complete entire subjection, which is here promised, hath not yet taken place. The promise must, therefore, refer to a still future order of things. This

doctrine of the progressive increase and final completeness of our Lord's kingdom is also virtually laid down in the passage from the Corinthians already cited: "He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." For that this subjugation of his several enemies will be successive, one after another, is strongly intimated by the expression, "the *last* enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

Now, to apprehend the probability of these things coming to pass, or rather to remove any opinion of their improbability, we ought constantly to bear in our mind this momentous truth, that in the hands of the Deity time is nothing; that he has eternity to act in. The Christian dispensation, nay, the world itself, may be in its infancy. A more perfect display of the power of Christ, and of his religion, may be in reserve; and the ages which it may endure, after the obstacles and impediments to its reception are removed, may be, beyond comparison, longer than those which we have seen, in which it has been struggling with great difficulties, most especially with ignorance and prejudice. We ought not to be moved, any more than the apostles were moved, with the reflection which was cast upon their mission, that since the "fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were." We ought to return the answer which one of them returned: that what we call tardiness in the Deity, is not so; that our so thinking it, arises from not allowing for the different importance, nay, probably, for the different apprehension of time, in the divine mind and in ours; that with him a thousand years are as one day—words which confound and astonish human understanding, yet strictly and metaphysically true.

Again; we should remember, that the apostles, the

very persons who asserted that God *would* put all things under him, themselves, as we have seen, acknowledged that it was *not yet* done. In the mean time, from the whole of their declarations and of this discussion, we collect, that Jesus Christ, ascended into the heavens, is, at this day, a great efficient being in the universe, invested by his Father with a high authority; which he exercises, and will continue to exercise, until the end of the world.

Thirdly, he is the same in his office. The principal offices assigned by the Scriptures to our Lord in his glorified state, that is, since his ascension into heaven, are those of a mediator and intercessor. Of the mediation of our Lord, the Scripture speaks in this wise: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus:" 1 Tim. ii. 5. It was after our Lord's ascension that this was spoken of him; and it is plain, from the form and turn of the expression, that his mediatorial character and office was meant to be represented as a perpetual character and office, because it is described in conjunction with the existence of God and men, so long as men exist: "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ." "Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name." "At that day ye shall ask in my name:" John xvi. 24, 26. These words form part of our Lord's memorable conversation with his select disciples, not many hours before his death; and clearly intimate the mediatorial office which he was to discharge after his ascension.

Concerning his *intercession*, not that which he occasionally exercised upon earth, when he prayed as he did most fervently for his disciples, but that which he now, at this present time, exercises, we have the

following text, explicit, satisfactory, and full. "But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood:" by priesthood is here meant the office of praying for others. "Wherefore he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us." No words can more plainly declare, than these words do, the perpetuity of our Lord's agency: that it did not cease with his presence upon earth, but continues. "He continueth ever: he ever liveth: he hath an unchangeable priesthood." Surely this justifies what our text saith of him, that he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" and that not in a figurative or metaphorical sense, but literally, effectually, and really. Moreover, in this same passage, not only the constancy and perpetuity, but the power and efficacy of our Lord's intercession are asserted: "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." They must come unto God: they must come *by* him: and then he is able to save them completely.

These three heads of observation, namely, upon his person, his power, and his office, comprise the relation in which our Lord Jesus Christ stands to us, whilst we remain in this mortal life. There is another consideration of great solemnity and interest, namely, the relation which we shall bear to him in our future state. Now the economy, which appears to be destined for the human creation, I mean, for that part of it which shall be received to future happiness, is, that they shall live in a state of local society with one another, and under Jesus Christ as their head; experiencing a sensible connexion amongst themselves, as well as the operation of his authority, as their Lord and governor. I think

it likely that our Saviour had this state of things in view, when, in his final discourse with his apostles, he tells them: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also:" John xiv. 2, 3. And again, in the same discourse, and referring to the same economy, "Father," says he, "I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me:" for that this was spoken, not merely of the twelve, who were then sitting with Jesus, and to whom his discourse was addressed, but of his disciples in future ages of the world, is fairly collected from his words, (xvii. 20.) "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me, through their word." Since the prayer here stated was part of the discourse, it is reasonable to infer, that the discourse, in its object, extended as far as the prayer, which we have seen to include believers, as well of succeeding ages, as of that then present.

Now concerning this future dispensation, supposing it to consist, as here represented, of accepted spirits, participating of happiness in a state of sensible society with one another, and with Jesus Christ himself at their head, one train of reflection naturally arises; namely, first, that it is highly probable there should be many expressions of Scripture which have relation to it: secondly, that such expressions must, by their nature, appear to us, at present, under a considerable degree of obscurity, which we may be apt to call a defect: thirdly, that the credit due to such expressions must depend upon their authority as portions of the written word of God, and not upon the probability,

much less upon the clearness of what they contain; so that our comprehension of what they mean must stop at very general notions; and our belief in them rest in the deference to which they are entitled, as Scripture declarations. Of this kind are many, if not all, of those expressions, which speak so strongly of the value, and benefit, and efficacy of the death of Christ; of its sacrificial, expiatory, and atoning nature. We may be assured that these expressions mean something real; refer to something real; though it be something which is to take place in that future dispensation of which we have been speaking. It is reasonable to expect, that, when we come to experience what that state is, the same experience will open to us the distinct propriety of these expressions, their truth, and the substantial truth which they contain; and likewise show us, that, however strong and exalted the terms are which we see made use of, they are not stronger nor higher than the subject called for. But for the present we must be, what I own it is difficult to be, content to take up with very general notions, humbly hoping that a disposition to receive and to acquiesce in what appears to us to be revealed, be it more or be it less, will be regarded as the duty which belongs to our subsisting condition, and the measure of information with which it is favoured; and will stand in the place of what, from our deep interest in the matter, we are sometimes tempted to desire, but which, nevertheless, might be unfit for us—a knowledge, which not only was, but which we perceived to be, fully adequate to the subject.

There is another class of expressions, which, since they professedly refer to circumstances that are to take place in this new state, and not before, will, it is likely,

be rendered quite intelligible by our experience in that state; but must necessarily convey very imperfect information until they be so explained. Of this kind are many of the passages of Scripture, which we have already noticed, as referring to the changes which will be wrought in our mortal nature; and the agency of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the intervention of his power, in producing those changes; and the nearer similitude which our changed natures, and the bodies with which we shall then be clothed, will bear to his. We read "that he shall change our vile body, that it may be like his glorious body." A momentous assurance, no doubt: yet, in its particular signification, waiting to be cleared up by our experience of the event. So likewise are some other particular expressions relating to the same event, such as being "unclothed," "clothed upon," "the dead in Christ rising first;" "meeting the Lord in the air;" "they that are alive not preventing those that are asleep," and the like. These are all most interesting intimations; yet to a certain degree obscure. They answer the purpose of ministering to our hopes, and comfort, and admonition, which they do without conveying any clear ideas: and this, and not the satisfaction of our curiosity, may be the grand purpose, for the sake of which intimations of these things were given at all. But then, in so far as they describe a change in the order of nature, of which change we are to be the objects, it seems to follow, that we shall be furnished with experience, which will discover to us the full sense of this language. The same remark may be repeated concerning the first and second death, which are expressly spoken of in the Revelations, and, as I think, alluded to and supposed in other passages of Scripture, in which they are not named.

The lesson, inculcated by the observation here pointed out, is this, that, in the difficulties which we meet with in interpreting Scripture, instead of being too uneasy under them, by reason of the obscurity of certain passages, or the degree of darkness which hangs over certain subjects, we ought first to take to ourselves this safe and consoling rule, namely, to make up for the deficiency of our knowledge by the sincerity of our practice; in other words, to act up to what we do know, or, at least, earnestly strive so to do. So far as a man holds fast to this rule, he has a strong ground of comfort under every degree of ignorance, or even of error. And it is a rule applicable to the rich and to the poor, to the educated and the uneducated, to every state and station of life; and to all the differences, which arise from different opportunities of acquiring knowledge. Different obligations may result from different means of obtaining information; but this rule comprises all differences.

The next reflection is, that in meeting with difficulties, nay, very great difficulties, we meet with nothing strange, nothing but what in truth might reasonably have been expected beforehand. It was to be expected, that a revelation, which was to have its completion in another state of existence, would contain many expressions which referred to that state; and which, on account of such reference, would be made clear and perfectly intelligible only to those who had experience of that state, and to us after we had attained to that experience; whilst, however, in the mean time, they may convey to us enough of information, to admonish us in our conduct, to support our hopes, and to incite our endeavours. Therefore the meeting with difficulties, owing to this cause, ought not

to surprise us, nor to trouble us overmuch. Seriousness, nay, even anxiety, touching every thing which concerns our salvation, no thoughtful man can help; but it is possible we may be distressed by doubts and difficulties more than there is any occasion to be distressed.

Lastly, under all our perplexities, under all the misgivings of mind, to which even good men (such is the infirmity of human nature) are subject, there is this important assurance to resort to, that we have a protection over our heads, which is constant and abiding: that God, blessed be his name, is for evermore: that Jesus Christ our Lord is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever: that, like as a traveller by land or sea, go where he will, always sees, when he looks up, the same sun; so in our journey through a varied existence, whether it be in our present state, or in our next state, or in the awful passage from one to the other; in the world in which we live, or in the country which we seek; in the hour of death, no less than in the midst of health, we are in the same upholding hands, under the same sufficient and unfailing support.

IX.

ON CONFIRMATION.

MARK X. 17.

And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

THE question which was here asked our Saviour, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" comprehends the whole of religion. He that can tell me this, tells me every thing. All knowledge and all faith is but to ascertain this one great point.

"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" is a question which there is no man or woman living, one would suppose, but must have thought upon. In the height and vigour of health and spirits; when every night brings rest, and every morning joy; when pleasures, new and fresh, are continually presenting themselves to the imagination; it is possible to be so in love with this world, as to forget, or rather wilfully to shut our eyes against the thoughts that it is ever to have an end. But this round of festivity and delight is not every man's portion, nor any man's portion long. The amusements of life flag and slacken. Vexations and disappointments teach us that they are not to be relied upon.

We pursue them with the eagerness of a child who is chasing a butterfly; and who, when he has caught it, finds that he is only grasping painted dust. We find that something more solid than mere diversion and sport must be attended to, to make even the present life comfortable and satisfactory. When we once grow serious, the most awful of all reflections opens itself full before our eyes, namely, that our interests and pleasures and prospects here will soon be finished; that we have another, and a far greater, concern to take care of. There is, we acknowledge, a period of man's life, about the time of his coming to manhood, when, himself and his acquaintance being all young and strong, he, for a course of perhaps nine or ten years, sees little alteration in the world about him. All things appear to stand firm. His enjoyments and connexions seem secure and stedfast. Instances of the fickleness of human affairs happen, but none which reach him. He is not yet admonished by experience, the only lesson which many will attend to, that this world is not the place to set up our staff in; and that we are called upon by the events of life, which is the voice of God himself, to look beyond it. However this season, so flattering to thoughtlessness, is of short duration. In the course of no great number of years, the most happy and fortunate have examples brought home to them of the uncertainty of every earthly dependence. Their acquaintance drop off; their friends and equals and companions go down into the grave; instances of mortality take place in their own families, or immediately before their eyes. Decay, and change, and death press upon them on all sides, and in a thousand shapes; the scene of the world moves and shifts; the present generation he sees passing along, and soon to be swept away from off the face

of the earth. Finding therefore this world to be no abiding place for any one; that, however it once smiled and delighted, its gay prospects are either gone or going, have either left us or are preparing to leave us: finding, I say, this; not taught it by others, but finding it out itself; the mind musing and meditating upon what is hereafter to become of it, into what new scene it shall next be introduced, is powerfully led to the inquiry which the words of the text present us with, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Diversion, or company, or hurry of business may keep this reflection for a while out of our thoughts; but in a silent hour or a wakeful night, in a solitary walk, or a pensive evening, it must and will come over our souls.

"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" If there be any who have not yet asked themselves this grand question, let me assure them that the time will come, and that it will not be long before it comes, when it will be the only question in the world which they will think worth caring about at all: that, although they may try to remove it from their minds at present, as being too awful for their spirits, they will soon come to know, that awful or not, it must be regarded, and inquired after, and searched into. It is, I think, a strong observation, that in managing our worldly affairs, we always consider ourselves as having an interest and concern after our deaths. Now it appears to me to be the very excess of unreasonableness and stupidity to be so careful and solicitous, so pleased and distressed as we are, about what is to take place after our deaths in this world, in which our existence then is only imaginary; and not to provide and look forward to our fate in the next world, where we are to be, where our interest is real and actual, where we shall ourselves feel,

where we shall ourselves enjoy or suffer, the happiness or misery which our former conduct has brought upon us.

These observations are made in order to show the deep importance of the question which was proposed to our blessed Lord, and that it is a point which it is natural for every man and woman breathing to think upon most anxiously. I would next wish you to attend to the character and circumstances of the person who proposed the question; for that is a consideration of some consequence. If you read Saint Matthew's account of the transaction (xix. 20), you will find, that the person who addressed this question to our Saviour was a *young man;* and that is the circumstance in the history which I desire may be particularly taken notice of. The earnestness and anxiety with which he sought to know what he was to do to inherit eternal life are most significantly expressed by the manner in which he presented himself to Christ: "And there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" From what he had seen of our Saviour's mighty works, and heard of his divine discourses, he seems to have been assured, that, if ever there was a person appeared in the world who could tell him what he was to do to be saved, our Saviour was that person. This was the question which hung and dwelt upon his mind; and now that he had an opportunity of being informed and satisfied concerning it, he most eagerly and devoutly embraced it. "He came running, and kneeled to him." Here therefore you have a youth, in the bloom and vigour of his age, in full possession of every thing which this world can give (for it appears that he was rich as well as young), solicitously searching after eternal life. He knew, that amidst all the pleasures of his age and

station, amidst all the delights and recreations of youth, the salvation of his immortal soul was not to be forgotten or neglected; nay, was the thing which stood before all other things, the business to be regarded with the deepest anxiety. This disposition was highly acceptable to our blessed Lord. "Jesus beholding him, loved him;" that is, approved affectionately that pious serious temper of mind, which led a young man, in the midst of health and strength and pleasure, to fix his thoughts upon the concerns of religion. And it is from this example, as well as from the supreme advantage of following it, that I would put it to the consciences of young persons of every rank and station of life, to take up religion *betimes*.

And there is a particular reason to young members of our church for giving attention to this matter at this time, because the bishop is about to hold a public confirmation, which is or ought to be a solemn initiation of young persons into the duties and hopes of a Christian. It is to be considered, with respect to religion, as a point for them to set off from upon their own bottom; as the line from which they start in the great race that is set before them; the term from which they may date their having their spiritual concerns in their own hands, and when it becomes their business to look to themselves and their behaviour, and begin that progress in virtue, which is the only course that can lead them, and which infallibly will lead them, to everlasting peace and rest and happiness in heaven. Such a point, such a term in a man's life, ought to be marked by some peculiar solemnity. And none seems better suited to the purpose, more becoming, or more affecting, than that ancient rite which Christ's church hath practised for a great many ages past, and which so many wise and good men, who have gone before us

in the steps and ways of godliness, have left us to celebrate in the office of confirmation.

I have endeavoured to impress upon your attention that the great question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" will one day be the only question we shall care about at all. I will now point out the happiness and wisdom of those who make it their care betimes, in their youth, and during the season of strength and activity. And I will admit that sentiments of religion are not the natural growth of youth, nor to be cherished without training and reflection. With us the case is rather different: the time of our life, or the state of our health, may have reminded most of us that our sojourning here cannot be long. But in youth, as I observed before, every thing wears the appearance of firmness and stability. The *appearance*, I say, for in truth, it is a delusion. What is the difference of ten or twenty years to eternity? What matters it to those who are dead, whether they died yesterday, last year, or many years ago; in youth, in manhood, or old age? What, in short, will it signify to us? Besides this, young persons are very much deceived in their calculations. The probability of life is not, as they suppose, in proportion to the shortness of our past years. Many distempers are peculiar to youth; many which are more dangerous at their time of life than at any other; many common to them with others, and quite as frequent amongst persons of their age as amongst persons of advanced years. Every day's experience proves, the very tomb-stones in the church-yard show, that whilst one, now and then, reaches three or fourscore of years, which all young persons reckon upon as a kind of certainty, and calculate upon having before them,—by far the greatest number are cut off at a much earlier period,

and very many in the prime of their lives. There is no age that is safe, no constitution that is secure from the visitation of death; nay, the strongest men and women are more liable to inflammatory disorders than those who are weaker; and these disorders are more fatal to them than to persons in less vigorous health.

But the grand reason for setting forwards early in a religious course is undoubtedly this, namely, that according as a man sets out at first, his character most frequently is fixed for ever, for good or for bad. This is a most solemn consideration indeed, and the fact is so; I mean humanly and generally speaking. Such as is the youth, such is the man. And I further believe it to be true, and the same thing has been remarked by very wise observers of human nature, that the character seldom changes much after the middle of life. I say seldom; I do not say never; because I hold it always possible, with the assistance of God's grace, to put away our sins; and that that assistance may always be procured by sincere prayer and corresponding endeavours, forasmuch as whilst God spares life, he spares it, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come and turn to him." We therefore do not now talk of possibility (for who would trust to possibility in a matter which is of infinite moment?), we are speaking of probability as gathered from actual experience: and experience proves, that if a person go into a course of vice and irreligion, and hold on in that course through youth to manhood, and from the dawn of manhood towards the middle of life, he seldom changes it effectually. Whether it be owing to the strength of habit, or that the conscience loses its sensibility and timorousness, the fact is so; and the knowledge of this fact, when they are informed of it by those who would be very unwilling to impose

upon them, ought at least to quicken the attention, or rather ought to alarm the fears of young persons, I mean persons from the age of fourteen or fifteen to that of twenty. They ought to consider themselves as at the crisis of their fate. They are arrived at the division of the road; and according as they turn to the right hand or to the left, they advance towards heaven, or draw nigh unto hell. A fearful consideration, and calculated, if any thing will do it, to make young people serious and earnest in their resolutions to set out right.

"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" was the question asked. The answer given was, "Keep the commandments." What God's commandments are, and how they are to be kept, you will for the most part know sufficiently; your conscience will not often fail of informing you. The point for you to endeavour, is to hold close to the dictates of conscience and the sense of duty, whatever passions, whatever inclinations, whatever allurements of pleasure strive to tempt and draw you aside from it; or however much the invitation of companions or the example of the world might seem to afford encouragement for so doing. Keep constantly in your minds this short maxim: that resolution at your age for a few years, is probably to fix your character for life, and your fate for ever. Young men and young women, think not that it is too early to be religious. Take heed: for whether you would ensure yourselves against the greatest of all dangers, the danger of being cut off in the midst of your sins, from which no age, no health, no constitution is a security or protection; whether you will take warning by the thousands and tens of thousands, who, having been drawn at an early age into vicious courses, have never

all their lives got out of them; whether you will credit those who have gone before you in the path of life, as to the danger of once yielding to temptations of sin, or will believe indeed your own eyes and observations as to the same thing; whether you would avoid that bitter repentance, those sore struggles which every sinner must undergo before he can possibly bring himself back to the right way, which are always painful, and often it is to be feared unsuccessful, that is, are not sufficiently persisted in; whether, finally, you hope to reach, as you proceed in life, that holiness of heart and temper which the steady practice of virtue produces, and which is sure of receiving from God a crown of proportionable glory and happiness in heaven: whichever of these considerations move and prompt you to a life of religion, begin it in time: hold fast your innocency: step into the right way. Look not aside to the guilty indulgences which many take delight in; they will fail you, they will forsake you; they will ruin you both soul and body, both your comforts in this world and your salvation in the next. Religion has great things in store for you; it will fill you with peace and joy, and hope and courage to your latest moment; and it will place you amongst the blessed in heaven, in the presence of your Father and Redeemer.

X.

THE DUTY OF SELF-EXAMINATION.

1 Cor. xi. 31.

For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

It is true that these words, together with the exhortation two verses before, "Let a man examine himself;" are spoken particularly of the Lord's supper. The Corinthians having strongly abused that institution, and lost sight of its religious nature entirely, St. Paul here bids them consider and reflect with themselves what they were about, what they were going upon, when they come together to eat the Lord's supper. I think, nevertheless, that these words may in the present day be taken in a general sense, because whatever reason there was for the Corinthians to examine themselves and judge themselves in relation to coming to the Sacrament, there is the same or greater reason for the duty in every other part or point of obligation in which we are apt to go wrong. St. Paul says, "if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged;" but as a man cannot judge without first examining himself and making a search into his own heart, I shall take occasion from these words to treat of the duty of self-examination, in which duty there are three things to be considered; its use, its neglect, and the seasons for it.

Now as to its use—for it is seldom a pleasant task, and therefore, unless useful, one would decline it—the

end of all religion is a good life; but a good life is no such easy thing to be compassed. We stand in need of all the aids and helps which we can procure either from religion or our own reason. Experience proves that they are all often too little. Now of all the instrumental parts of religion, there is none in its nature so likely—none that in fact, I believe, does influence men's behaviour so effectually, as this one of self-examination; as it is in the first place a man's own doing—what the man does for himself. And in religion, as in many other things in the world, what a man does for himself is of much more avail than what others do, or can do for him. In every religious ordinance, in baptism, in the Lord's supper, in public worship, in reading, in hearing, there is the ministry of others; but in the business of self-examination, every man is his own minister. He must do it for himself and not another. The other services may be perhaps gone through with a small share of thought and attention; but this is properly and entirely the business of thought.

Secondly; self-examination, from the nature of it, is private—which is a circumstance of consequence. I do not mean to dispute or undervalue the use or obligation of public worship, or of public ordinances; but I do say, that for influence and effect upon a man's self, there is nothing comparable to what passes in private. There is no hypocrisy, for there is no one to see you. There is no restraint; no being tied down to forms, which, be they ever so good, cannot reach every man's private and particular circumstances. There is nothing to disturb or take off your attention. For which reason the impression is always the deepest which a man fastens upon himself in his own meditations. But upon the subject of the use of self-examination, the fact

itself may be relied upon; for I believe that it may be said of self-examination with the same truth that it was said of prayer—that self-examination will either make us leave off sinning, or sin will make us leave off self-examination. It is an exercise, which, if honestly persisted in, will make the worst man in the world grow better; consequently, the generality of us, who are mixed characters, composed of some good with a great deal of bad, will be sure of amending and improving ourselves by it. Our good properties will be strengthened and increased, and our bad ones gradually got rid of.

I have said that any sinful course, if not got the better of, makes a man tired of self-examination. It perfectly resembles a case which is common enough in life. When a man's worldly affairs go wrong, when they grow perplexed and involved, and are become desperate and irretrievable, we can never find that they look into their books, or try to settle their accounts: people in these circumstances have been known never to have looked into a book, or kept an account, for years before they failed. Now I would ask whether their affairs went on the better for never looking into—whether the danger was the less for shutting their eyes against it—whether they were longer before they failed—whether they failed in less debts, or whether people were more lenient towards them, or whether their friends were the better for their conduct? and I would also ask whether, if it had been possible to have retrieved their fortunes, it would have been done any other way than by taking up and searching into their accounts? Now this case and that of a sinner are perfectly similar; except in one circumstance, that a man's worldly affairs are often so far deranged, that no future care or diligence could restore them; whereas the

sinner's condition is never desperate, while there is life.

This is all to show the use of self-examination. The next inquiry is into the proper subject of it. And upon this head I shall confine myself to a small part of what might be delivered, in order that this small part may be remembered. Now every one that has attended at all to mankind has observed, and very justly, that the better part of both our virtues and vices are habits—that it is the habit of this or that sort of behaviour or discourse; and not one or two, or a few single acts of virtue or of vice, which constitute the character. The truth is, we are all the servants of our habits—governed much more by habit than by reason, or argument, or reflection; that is to say, ten actions of our lives spring from habit, for one that proceeds from deliberation. There is no living in the world without falling into habits. Since then we must fall into some habit or other, and since our moral character, our good or bad life, and by consequence, our happiness or misery hereafter, depend upon the choice and formation of our habits; upon the good or bad ones getting possession of us, it leaves the chief and principal business of self-examination, to *watch our habits*, to mark what evil custom is growing upon us, to descry the first setting in of a vicious habit, and break it off before it becomes strong and inveterate. The management of our habits is all in all—the end of religion, and the great business of life: and as these are to be managed only when they are young and pliant, at least ordinarily speaking, it becomes of the last importance from time to time to review our conduct, to seek out what new habit is stealing upon us—whether it is fit or not to be tolerated; if not, then we know our

enemy, and we know our work; we know in what quarter to keep watch, and where to turn our force and resolution. A man who does not do regularly something of this sort, but thinks it unnecessary or too troublesome, will find himself entangled, before he is conscious of it, in some pernicious habit or other, which he will live to lament as the greatest calamity of his life, but possibly may never live to break through. When a Christian retires, therefore, to the business of self-examination, I will suppose his first care will be to inquire and look back upon the state of his habits—to inquire how it stands with them—whether growing better or growing worse—what new ones are stealing upon him—whether he has been able of late to manage and discipline the old ones. Now it may give a sort of method to his examination, to remind him that there are habits of acting, habits of speaking, and habits of thinking; and that these all must be taken into the account and estimated. In his habits of acting, such for example as drunkenness, he will ask himself whether his excesses of late in that way have been more or less frequent; whether his ardour after such indulgences be not grown stronger than he remembers it to have been. If he finds the inquiry turning out against him, that such a habit is insensibly advancing, though ever so slowly upon him, as I said before, he knows his enemy and his business—he knows that if he does not get the better of such a habit in its infancy, it will be in vain to contend with it when fastened and confirmed. He may repeat the same process with respect to all other licentious vices—whether he has fled from opportunity and temptation, or whether he has not courted and sought out for them—whether he has the

command and mastery of his passions, or they of him—whether the guilt and danger, and final consequence of any criminal pursuit are as much in his thoughts as formerly, or less, or at all—whether the remorse and accusation of his conscience be not wearing away by such arguments as are to be found in justification of them, only by practising a little self-deceit. If a man deal faithfully with himself, he will learn the truth of his spiritual condition, and where in any respect he finds matters growing worse, there, if he have his salvation at heart, he will take the alarm, and apply all the diligence, and all the resolution he is possessed of. When he has done with the class of licentious vices, he may turn to the class of mercenary vices—whether his self-interest and worldly concerns be not more in his mind than any thing else, and whether it is not more and more there—whether over-reaching tricks and contrivances are not more frequent with him than heretofore, and less thought of—whether he be not sliding into some unlawful dishonest course of gain, of unfair dealing, or of unfair concealment—whether he has been able to forego profit for conscience sake—in a word, whether his honesty has stood firm and upright. And let him apply to these inquiries that very just and affecting observation of St. John: "If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things."

But as there are habits of acting, so are there habits of speaking; habits of lying, which is as much a habit as any one thing I can mention; of slander, which is as often habit as it is malice, or (more properly speaking) though it begins in malice, it soon becomes so habitual as to be almost involuntary. There are habits of

captiousness, ingenious in perverting what others say—of censoriousness, unable to discover or acknowledge a favourable point in any character except those of our own party, or to speak candidly of any thing in any person. These are all the effects of habit, and the point is to perceive when the habit is setting in. Now the circumstance which discovers this, is when any fault of any sort happens to have been committed oftener than before, and when it is each time committed with less and less uneasiness, then is it time to look to this point of our character. But thirdly, as there are habits of acting and speaking, so are there those of thinking. These habits are of all others the hardest to be rectified—for the imagination can draw upon her own fund when she pleases, without waiting for opportunity or assistance. Her wanderings are under no control of other persons, because they cannot be known by them. They do not break forth into outward acts; so we practise them almost without knowing it. They creep upon us insensibly. We think only to indulge a momentary pleasure; till by frequent repetitions it grows into a habit, rendering us incapable of entertaining any other subject whenever the humour sets in for that. The thing is, that vanity, pride, ambition, covetousness, romantic schemes of pleasure, ruinous projects, revenge or lust, take so strong hold upon us, that those operate most powerfully and involuntarily upon our thoughts. One great part, therefore, of self-examination, is to watch over our thoughts, and the moment we perceive any bad trains of thinking beginning to form in our imagination, to break them off forthwith, by refusing to entertain them—by avoiding such objects as are likely

to foment them, and, above all other rules, to occupy our thoughts closely some other way; for, assure yourselves, criminal thoughts sooner or later break out into pernicious and extravagant actions.

The watching of our habits is what I would lay out as the business of self-examination—not perhaps the sole business, but the most important business, because most conducive to a good life.

The last point to be considered is the seasons for this duty. Those of leisure and reflection, of a serious and contemplative turn, may possibly want no directions or no certain occasions for this duty. Their thoughts of themselves naturally and frequently turn to such subjects. But they who are engaged in business, or who mix with the bustle of the world, young persons in high health and spirits, poor persons taken up with daily labours, rich persons occupied in rounds of diversion and company—these all must form to themselves stated seasons for this duty, or they will not perform it at all. It is to be hoped we have many of us our reasons for private prayer. Self-examination will properly accompany our private devotions, if not always, at least sometimes, and at some stated times. Sunday is with all of us a day of cessation from business and from our ordinary diversions: public worship takes up only a part of the day—there is always time enough to spare for this important concern.

The return of the sacrament is a fit opportunity for such an exercise.

I have only to add, that the business of self-examination, like every business of importance, should be gone about when the mind and spirits are calm, firm, and cheerful. There is great uncertainty in what is done

under the impression of some fright, or state of affliction; when the thoughts are hurried and disturbed, and the spirits sunk and overwhelmed.

Self-examination is a serious, but not a melancholy business. No one need let his spirits sink under it, or enter upon it with terror and dejection; because, let a man's spiritual condition turn out upon inquiry ever so bad, he has it always in his power to mend it; and because when the amendment is begun and goes on, every examination of himself affords fresh matter of comfort, hope, and satisfaction.

XI.

SACRAMENT.

1 Cor. xi. 26.

As oft as ye eat of this bread and drink of this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come.

There are some opinions, concerning the Sacrament of the Lord's supper, which are very deserving of consideration, as they are the means either of deterring Christians from coming to it, or making them uneasy in their minds after it; or, lastly, as they sometimes lead men to abuse this institution to the purposes of vice and profligacy, which is by far the worst of all.

There are many errors in religion, which having no bad effect upon a man's life or conduct, it is not necessary to be solicitous in correcting. A man may live in such like errors as these without prejudice, we humbly hope, to his happiness or salvation. But when errors in opinion lead to errors in practice, when our notions affect our behaviour, it then becomes the duty of every Christian, and especially of every teacher of Christianity, to set these notions right, as far as it is in his power.

Many persons entertain a scruple about coming to the sacrament, on account of what they read in the 11th chapter of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, concerning the unworthy receiving of it. "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself;" surely, they say, it is better

to keep away from the Lord's supper altogether than to incur the risk of so terrible a sentence. And who, they will ask, can know that he is safe from it? Who will be bold enough to say that he eats and drinks worthily? Who, however, that is conscious of many defects and imperfections—who, that has made so imperfect preparation for it, and what is worse, who is so liable to forget it all, and relapse again into his former course of life? Now there are two sorts of persons who profess this scruple. There are your heartless, indifferent Christians, who are glad of any reason to get rid of their duty, and who, because this seems a sort of excuse from coming to the sacrament, take up with it without farther inquiry, or any sincere concern, indeed, about the matter.

Besides these, there are also many serious and well-meaning Christians who have been much and really affected by this text; and who have been either kept away, as I said before, from the Communion, or much disturbed and distressed in their minds about it. Now none but sincere and pious people have these scruples, and therefore the utmost tenderness and indulgence are due to them; even where there is less foundation for them than there appears to be in the present case. For the ease, therefore, and satisfaction of all such, I will endeavour, in this discourse, to make out two points. 1st. That the unworthy eating and drinking, meant by St. Paul, is what we, at this time of day, can scarcely possibly be guilty of. 2d. That the *damnation* here spoken of means worldly punishment; or, as we say, judgement upon the offender in this world; and not everlasting perdition in the world to come, as the term *damnation* commonly signifies in our mouths.

First; I maintain that the eating and drinking,

meant by St. Paul, is what we, at this time of day, can hardly be guilty of.

St. Paul, you observe, is not writing to all Christians in general, but to the Corinthians—to the Christian converts in that city. Now these converts, it should seem, had been guilty of some disorderly behaviour in the receiving of the Lord's supper, or, at least, at the time of receiving it. "Now in this that I declare unto you I praise ye not; that ye come together, not for the better but for the worse." (x. 17.) The coming together in this verse means the coming to the sacrament, because in the 20th verse he says, "When ye come together into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper." So then they had incurred St. Paul's censure for some misbehaviour about the sacrament; and the next question will be, what that misbehaviour was? And this we find out from what St. Paul says of them, in the 21st and 22d verses, which two verses are the key, indeed, to the whole chapter. "In eating, every one taketh before other his own supper, and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What! have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? Or despise ye the church of God and those that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not."

The fact was, then, the Corinthians had perverted the Lord's supper into a common feast, or, at least, accompanied it with a common feast; in which, forgetting entirely the nature and design of this institution, they indulged themselves without moderation in eating and drinking, so as, in some degree, to come away from it surfeited and drunken: "One is hungry, and another is drunken: one goes to indulge in eating, and another in drinking."

It appears, I dare say, to you unaccountable how any people could fall into such a mistake and misbehaviour as this—so gross an abuse of a religious institution; but it appears from St. Paul's words that, in fact, they did so; and one way of accounting for it may be this. These Corinthians, you are to consider, were not like us, bred up to Christianity from their infancy. They had been heathens, and a great part of them were converted to Christianity. Now it had been a practice among them before their conversion, as it was with all the heathens, to make feasts to their gods, in which all sorts of intemperance were practised and allowed of. It is possible, and probably was the case, that when they became Christians, some of them mistook the Lord's Supper for one of these sorts of feasts which they had been accustomed to hold to their gods, and celebrated it accordingly with the same licentious festivity and intemperance. But whatever was the reason of it, such, in fact, was their mistake and misbehaviour. It is certain, however, that the misbehaviour was that unworthy eating and drinking which St. Paul mentioned, and which he condemned in such severe terms. The fault, which St. Paul reproves, was the fault which the people he writes to had been guilty of. That is very plain. The fault they had been guilty of was, the indulging themselves to excess in eating and drinking at the time of celebrating this sacrament. That is equally plain, from St. Paul's account of them: "The one is hungry and another drunken. What! have ye not houses to eat and drink in?" (to make, that is, your entertainments and hold your feasts in?) which shows that they made a common feast and entertainment of the holy communion.

St. Paul proceeds to state to them the history of the institution of the sacrament, which certainly was the proper preservative against the gross abuse of it; and he adds, in order to put an end to so strange proceedings, "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily," that is, in this unworthy manner which ye have done, "eateth and drinketh damnation to himself"—"not discerning the Lord's body." That is, not distinguishing it from a common feast—not at all reflecting that it was a commemoration of the Lord's body.

I am now, therefore, authorized to say, that the unworthy receiving, intended by St. Paul, is what none of us can almost possibly be guilty of; as none of us, I trust, can ever so far forget ourselves as to mistake this institution for a worldly entertainment, or behave at it in that unseemly manner that the Corinthians did.

The next point I undertook to show was, that the damnation denounced in the text did not mean final perdition in the world to come; which is what the word commonly signifies, but only judgements and punishments upon them in this world. It should have been rendered *condemnation*—eateth and drinketh *condemnation* to himself; for the word in the original means any sort of punishment, either temporal or eternal; so that from the expression itself, it would have been dubious which the apostle meant, had he not, in the verse following, added an explanation of the matter, which clears it up sufficiently. "For this cause," (that is, for their misbehaviour and unworthy receiving), "many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." That is, many are visited by weaknesses and infirmities, and many are cut off by death: which are all, you observe, worldly judgements; and these im-

mediately following the mention of damnation or condemnation, show that worldly punishment and visitations were what St. Paul meant by it.

I allege, therefore, that no Christian at this day has any thing to fear from this text. I do not mean, but that men may come to the sacrament with such a thoughtlessness and levity, as entirely destroys the good effect of it; though I hope and believe that is not much or often the case; but I mean that none of us, the least and worst prepared even, incur the crime against which St. Paul denounced the sentence. And if we do not incur the crime, we have no occasion to fear that the sentence will be applied to us.

Others, again, are kept away from the sacrament by the fear that, after they have received it, they should relapse into their former sins, and so only aggravate their guilt and punishment. To such I shall answer, that all we can do, and even all that is required of us to do, at the sacrament, is to be sincere in our resolutions at the time. Whether these resolutions take effect or not is another question, although a most serious one.

But if they be hearty and sincere at the time, I see no reason to doubt but that a man is a worthy communicant, and will be accepted as such. And our resolutions failing once or twice, or oftener, is no reason why we should not renew them again; nay, that it must be by dint of these resolutions at last, that we are to get rid of our evil courses, if at all: unless we mean to give ourselves up to vice absolutely, and without any resistance, or endeavours to break through it; which is the worst of all possible conditions.

Others again come away discouraged and disappointed, if they do not feel in themselves that elevation

of spirit, that glow and warmth of devotion, that sort of rapture and ecstasy which they expected; and look upon themselves as forsaken of God, and not favoured with that share and influence of his spirit which other Christians are.

Now such people cannot do better than turn to the Scriptures, and expect no more than what is there promised. They will not find it there promised—either that any extraordinary effusions of the Holy Ghost are communicated by the sacrament, or that those effusions show themselves in any great transports, in any visible and extraordinary agitation of the spirits. The truth is, these emotions are in a great measure constitutional. Those who feel them ought not to be elated by them—those who feel them not have no reason to be cast down and made uneasy on that account. If they find religion operating upon their lives, they may always rely upon that test, and be at peace.

But lastly; the sacrament, it is to be feared, is not seldom abused to the purposes of licentiousness. Men consider it as a sort of expiating, or wiping away their former sins and errors; and as being at liberty to begin, as it were, again, upon a new account. As I said before, the best and sincerest will sometimes fail; yet, if they are sincere, they make us worthy partakers of the communion. But when we at the very time either expressly intend to begin again our evil practices, when the former ones are, as we suppose, cancelled; or allow such a secret thought to find place without rebuke in our minds, it then becomes a very different case. We cannot, when we relapse, complain that our resolutions fail us. The truth is, we never made any—any, I mean, that were sincere and hearty, which are the only

ones to be accounted of. There was duplicity and insincerity at the time—a voluntary deceiving of ourselves; and an attempt, if one may so speak, to deceive God.

This is mockery and profanation, not devotion; and let men either discard all such hollow reservations, or come not to that holy table.

But I hope and believe that is seldom the case. I hope and believe that those who frequent the holy communion are sincere. But the danger is—the thing to be provided against—the thing to be warned of, is, that we do not take advantage of any scruples or appearances, either of doubt or difficulty, for the purpose of indulging our disinclination to religious exercises, for the sake of having a pretence for avoiding that which in our hearts we have no real concern or desire to perform.

Scruples that proceed from a good conscience, however weak or groundless, will meet, I doubt not, with indulgence from the Father of mercies; but when notions are taken up to flatter our vices—to amuse or lay asleep the conscience, or reconcile it to the practice which we will not quit; such must not expect to come off as so many speculative errors: for these are errors which no one could have fallen into had it not been for the pernicious influence of vicious habits, and for the sake of that ease to our minds, and encouragement to those sins which they seem to allow.

XII.

PUBLIC WORSHIP.

HEBREWS X. 15.

Forsake not the assembling yourselves together, as the manner of some is.

THE first thing recorded of the disciples of Christ after their Lord's ascension was their uniting with one accord in prayer and supplication; and being with one accord in one place; continuing stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship; continuing daily with one accord in the Temple; and breaking bread, that is, celebrating the Holy Communion, from house to house; lifting up the voice with one accord; their coming together the first day of the week to break bread; coming together in the church into one place to celebrate the Lord's Supper; meeting and keeping silence in the church; the whole church being gathered together in prayer, and coming into one place—a rich man and a poor man entering the assembly; and lastly, not forsaking the assembling of themselves together: so that the practice of assembling together at stated times for the purpose of joint devotion, religious exercises, and religious instruction, stands upon the highest and earliest authority by which the practice can come recommended to us—the united example of the apostles and immediate followers of Jesus Christ.

These persons acted under the instructions which themselves had received from Christ's own mouth, and under the extraordinary influence of the Holy Spirit: therefore, an institution founded on the common consent and practice of such persons, so circumstanced, is to be deemed a divine institution. Not to mention the words of Christ, as recorded in Saint Matthew's Gospel, which contain the strongest invitation to joint worship and prayer: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."—Agreeably herewith, all members and sects of Christianity, let them differ ever so much in the articles of faith or rules of practice, have concurred in this—the appointing stated times and hours for public devotion; in complying with what they find to have been the usage and institution of the apostles and immediate preachers of Christ's religion, whose authority they all acknowledge. This may be clearly traced up to the very ascension of Jesus Christ; especially when coupled with plain words, as above stated, in evidence of a divine command; and upon this command our obligation to attend upon public worship primarily and principally rests. For when we have once good reason to believe that a thing is the command and will of God, there is an end of all other consideration about it; however, all other considerations are to be introduced only as auxiliary and subordinate to that. It is to no purpose to say that coming to church is only a ceremony or a custom: were that true, however, which it is not, it would be sufficient to reply, that it is what God is pleased to require. It is his pleasure which ultimately makes any thing a duty; and where that pleasure is declared or known, it is presumptuous in us to distinguish or to say that one thing must be

observed, and another dispensed with; one institution is of a moral, another of a scriptural nature. They are all instituted by Him who has complete right and authority to direct us. When we add to this, what I believe will not often be found to fail, that one known deviation from the command of God introduces insensibly, yet inevitably, all deviations from duty, we shall see the force of the preceding obligation in its true light.

Having thus stated the first and principal ground of our duty to attend upon public worship, namely, the command and will of God, signified in the concurrent usage and judgement of those with whom God was pleased to carry on a communication of his will, and by whom he imparted it to the rest of mankind, I shall proceed to fortify the argument, by showing the propriety and expediency of the thing itself.

And first of all: the propriety of joint devotion appears, as it respects the object of all devotion—the supreme God himself. His nature is so glorious, so infinitely exalted above ours, that we are not worthy, as it is truly said, to offer him any sacrifice. The only approach we can make towards him, in my mind, at all suited to his transcendent dignity, is by joining our hearts and voices, by rendering earnest and united adoration to the Author of the universe.

We read that God is worshipped in heaven by the joint praises of hosts and myriads of blessed saints. It is not each solitary angel offering its own thanksgivings to its Creator; but the collection of beings presenting themselves together before the throne, and ascribing glory, and honour, and power to their great Father and Governor, with united and never-ceasing acclamations. Now, the only way in which we can imitate them, or

produce the smallest resemblance of celestial devotion, is by coming into one place, with hearts glowing with piety to God, and with charity to one another; and with decency of outward behaviour and expression, accompanied with inward sensations of humble but ardent devotion, falling down before him who is the Parent, the Preserver, the Saviour, and Benefactor, and Guide, and Guardian of the whole human race. A king is pleased by the united addresses of faithful subjects, a parent is moved by the joint supplications of dutiful children. For the same reason that we see a prince or a parent affected by the unanimous praise, humble demeanor, and united voice of their subjects or children, may we conceive the divine Being to accept with complacency the public worship of a devout and serious congregation.

Public worship, as it respects the great object of all worship, is the best and nearest advance which creatures like ourselves are capable of making towards a homage in anywise adequate to the glory and dignity of the Being whom we address; imperfect at best; if perfect, unworthy of him—but still our all, and our utmost; still it is attempting to hallow the name of God on earth as it is in heaven—that is, by a social and united act of prayer and thanksgiving.

The propriety may relate to the Supreme Being; the expediency must relate to ourselves. And this becomes the next subject of consideration.

The plain way of computing the utility of an institution is to calculate what would be the effect if the institution was altogether laid aside. Now it appears to me not too much to say, that if public worship was discontinued in a country, the very care and thought of God would vanish—not at once, but would insensibly

decay and wear out, till it was forgotten and lost from the minds and memory of mankind. The generality of the people would come, in process of time, to know as little of their Creator's institution, and think and care as little about it, as they do of the religion of their forefathers, the ancient Britons: and the effect which any institution, or the omission of it, has upon the generality of mankind, is what ought chiefly to be attended to. It is not what two or three scholars, what a few who give themselves up to meditation and study might do without the assistance of these institutions, but what the general condition of mankind would be without it. Amongst these, something visible, something external, is absolutely necessary to remind them of religious matters; and the very visible external part of Christianity is its religious assemblies, and its sabbaths, and its sacraments. In any, or in such change of civil polity, where all public worship and observance of the sabbath is obliged to be discontinued, it is wonderful how soon the impression and thought of religion begin to be laid aside. Man is an animal partly rational and partly sensitive. In the eye of cool abstract reasoning, the way to judge of the truth and importance of religion is not perhaps to see whether any outward public act of religion be upheld or not; and where we are under the direction of this and of nothing else, the influence and impression of religion would be neither more nor less for any external observation whatever. But *that* purely rational nature is not the nature of man: he has senses which must be applied to; for by these his conduct, if not his judgement, is guided and drawn, more than by speculation. Therefore if he be not kept up by something visible and obvious to his senses; if a man have not constantly some-

thing to see and to join in; some outward public expression of worship, some distinction of times and places, something, in a word, to revive from time to time, and refresh the fading ideas of religion in his imagination, they will by degrees lose all their hold and all their effect. His will, and his sluggish resolutions to will, are then dull and languid. And yet in his judgement and understanding, religion may have all the evidence of its truth, and must of necessity be equally important as it ever was. But judgement and understanding are not what direct the ways of men, or ever can do, without the assistance of impressions made upon the imagination by means of the senses.

But secondly: I do not find that any are inclined to dispute the point so far as to say that the knowledge of Almighty God, of our relation to him, of our dependence upon him for all that is to come, and the duties which we owe to him, and to our fellow-creatures for his sake, are such in themselves as can do without any kind of religious act and religious worship at all. But why (say they) is it necessary to come to church for this? Is it not equally effectual, equally acceptable to God and useful to myself, when performed in my own chamber or in my own family?

In the first place: I wish it were generally true, that those who seldom frequent church were regular in their devotion at home; for whatever face and reasonableness there may be in the excuse, it must still depend upon the fact being true, or it cannot stand them in any stead. Men are not less remiss and negligent in their private than their public worship.—But in the second place: May it not be said, that without public worship the greater part would exercise no religious worship at all? It is not every man that is capable of conceiving

an address to his Creator; however, it is not every one that thinks and feels himself capable. This would be a constant excuse. It is easy to direct men to retire into their hearts and their own closets, there to commune with God and with themselves; and an excellent and spiritual exercise this is: but there are but a few who are qualified for such a task. There are men who would never feel inclination for such a task, through the whole course of their lives. Besides that, nothing is done regularly which is not done at stated times and seasons. When times and seasons are stated and appointed by public authority and common consent, they are always observed, and will be observed, more or less. But is it to be expected from the generality of men, occupied in the constant round of daily business and daily amusements, or interested in the providing a subsistence for themselves and family; or that others, no less eager in raising a fortune, or engaged in spending one; is it, I say, to be expected that men thus conditioned and circumstanced should in general prescribe to themselves regular returns of private or domestic devotion, or should withdraw themselves from all engagements to attend these returns? Therefore if any one, as an apology for absenting himself from public worship, says that public assemblies are not necessary to the men who would and do perform their devotions at home; I answer, that whatever they may be to you, they are necessary for others, or the generality of others: who neither could nor would, without stated returns of public devotion, exercise any religious worship at all. They would be without that opportunity of religious instruction which Christian assemblies afford. Let no one say, I stay at home because I can hear nothing at church but what I know already; but what I learn at

home is learnt better by my own reflection. Be it so: but if this be the case with you, it is not so with all, or with the generality of others; and whatever is for the benefit of the whole is binding upon the whole. For, to let you see how necessary your attendance upon public worship and instruction, if not for yourself, is for others, you need only reflect what would be the consequence if any one was to withdraw himself from religious assemblies who found that he was above receiving any benefit from them. First one would drop, and then another, till none was left but those whose humility and low opinion of themselves disposed them to seek assistance and instruction from any quarter, and who, in fact, were probably nearer the spirit of Christianity than the others. In one word, assemblies for religious purposes would speedily be put out of countenance and out of credit, if what we call the higher class of mankind were to absent themselves from the appointed places, that they might be qualified to exercise their religious duties without them, and every one who pleased was at liberty to rank himself of that class. You must also observe one thing, which you must expect will be quite your own case.—You absent yourself from church to employ your time more, you think, to your edification, in reading or meditation; and possibly you may, but your ignorant neighbour, who stays from church to spend his day in idleness and drunkenness, and less religious society than any other day in the week, will think he only follows your example, because you both agree in this—in staying from church. Now one is bound to consider, not only what the actions are in themselves, but the effects they are likely to produce by their example: for loving to do good is virtue; loving to do harm is vice; and it matters little whether the

good or harm is the immediate consequence of our own conduct, or proceed from the influence which our conduct has upon others.

I forbear to mention at present any subordinate, though important advantages, which result from social worship; because it is enough for one time to understand the direct ground of our obligation. I propose in the foremost place, the command of God, evidenced by the practice and example of all the apostles and first followers of Christ. I propose, in the second place, the propriety of social worship, with respect to the object of worship—the Supreme Being himself, as the only and best advance we are capable of making towards a homage in any way suited to the dignity of his nature and the immensity of our obligation. I propose, in the third place, the utility of public devotion to ourselves; which utility I ground upon three plain propositions: Religious worship, of some kind, is absolutely necessary, to uphold a sense of religion in the world. Without public worship at stated times and places, a great part of mankind would exercise no religious worship at all. If those who thought themselves needlessly instructed and directed to hear in our religious assemblies unnecessary truths, were for that reason to forsake the assembling themselves together, religious assemblies would soon be put out of countenance and out of credit, and in process of time would be laid aside: for the most ignorant and incapable, provided they were of a presumptuous temper, would take courage from the example of their betters to withdraw themselves as well as others, and convert that time which was intended for the best purposes to idleness, debauchery, and excess.

XIII.

OUTWARD ACTS OF DEVOTION NO EXCUSE FOR NEGLECT OF MORALITY.

MATT. v. 20.

Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.

IT will be sufficient at present to observe, that the Pharisees were a religious sect among the Jews, who set up for extraordinary sanctity and strictness, as St. Paul says, "after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee." The Scribes were the persons employed to interpret the Jewish law, as our Saviour asks, "How say the Scribes, that Christ is the son of David?" They were appointed to instruct the people, and probably the youth in particular, in that law. Both these descriptions of men were at that time of day of the greatest reputation in the country, for holiness and wisdom; and both valued themselves chiefly upon, and made their righteousness consist in, a most strict and rigid observance of the rites, ceremonies, and outward offices of religion: such, for example, as fasting, making long prayers, avoiding all unclean meat, and unclean persons, according to the distinction of their law—attending upon the Temple at their great feast, not eating with unwashed hands, and many other such outward acts as were commanded; some very proper and reason-

able, others again frivolous and superstitious. It was in the outward observance of these that the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees consisted; and our Saviour tells his disciples, that unless their righteousness was something more and better than this, "unless it exceeded the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, they could not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

If there was one thing which our Saviour laboured more than another—if there was one error against which he inveighed with more than usual earnestness, it was the trusting in the rites and ceremonies, the outward duties and offices of religion, and neglecting in the meantime, or living in the transgression of, the substantial obligations of virtue and morality. And it was with great reason, that he so industriously cautioned his followers against this notion; it being that into which mankind in all ages and countries of the world have been most apt to fall.

We will first take notice of some passages of Scripture, which show our Lord's sentiments upon the subject; and add a few reflections, by way of making them applicable to ourselves.

In the 23d chapter of Matthew, he expresses himself very strongly on this subject, and in a variety of phrases. "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye pay tithe of mint, and cummin, and anise, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy and faith, or rather fidelity: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." The paying tithe of mint and cummin was only put as an instance; the observation is general, that while they were scrupulous to the least tittle about the outward ordinances and observance of the law, they hoped

to pass over the more substantial part of it, and what our Saviour calls "the weightier matters of the law;" justice, mercy, and fidelity. This was their conduct; and how does our Saviour treat it? He calls it no better than hypocrisy, and promises it nothing but woe: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites."

But our Saviour goes on: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye make clean the outside of the platter, but within ye are full of extortion and excess." About the outside of the cup, or that part of their conduct which was open and shown to the world, which consisted of specious performances, and acts of outward devotion and piety, they were wonderfully studious and exact; while they were full of excess within, neither careful to observe the rules of honesty or humanity in their dealings with others, nor to moderate and keep within bounds their lusts and passions. "Thou blind Pharisee," proceeds our Saviour—blind as mistaking altogether the true nature and design of religion—"cleanse first that which is within the cup, that the outside of it may be clean also;" begin at the right end, and bestow the chief and first care in setting to rights thy heart—thy moral principles and practice; and then all thy outward piety will become thee—it will no longer be a hollow treacherous sanctity, but a real and acceptable purity. Much the same with this is what our Saviour goes on with in the next verse: "Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness—even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity;" and then condemning them for their persecution of the prophets, which does not directly belong to this subject, he concludes with an

expression, which is so exceeding strong, as he scarcely (only once, I believe,) used on any other occasion, and which shows his absolute dislike and detestation of this pride of character: "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

There is another passage in the same Gospel, which is much to our present purpose. It is in the 15th chapter, and upon this occasion. The Pharisees came to Jesus with a complaint against his disciples for eating bread with unwashen hands—a point they were very exact in, not out of cleanliness, but on a religious account, and because it openly transgressed the tradition of the elders. Our Saviour, after retorting upon this charge of transgressing the tradition of their elders, by showing them that they by their traditions made vain the commandments of God, makes this remark upon the particular complaint before him: "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth;" and after these words explains himself more fully to his disciples, as follows: "Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man;" and specifies what vices they are which proceed out of the heart; "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, blasphemies—these are they that defile a man; but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man." It appears from hence, that the Pharisees accounted the breach of their religious ceremonies and observances to be the greatest guilt and defilement that a man could incur; that our Saviour, on the contrary, maintained that these were no defilement in comparison; that it was immorality and vice which spoil the inward principle; and that evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, and so forth, were the pollutions most real and most odious

to God. So then, whether he met with those who thought all righteousness and religion consisted in forms and observances, or with those who thought there was no vice like the breach of such things; with both he dealt very freely, and told them that the first and great point to perform towards men was to love mercy and justice, and the first and great care to avoid actual vices;—that in the sight and esteem of God, their strictness in matters of outward religion was but hypocrisy without some real virtue, and that the vices they were to fear and guard against were the defilements of sin.

There is one other declaration of our Saviour's to the same effect, and so clear as to need no sort of explanation. We find it in the 12th chapter of St. Mark. A certain Scribe came to our Saviour to ask him which was the first commandment of all. Our Saviour's answer is explicit: "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment, and the second is like unto it—namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. The Scribe replied—Well, master, thou hast said the truth; for there is one God, and there is none other but he, and to love him with all the heart, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." From this incomparable piece of conversation, which we shall do well to read over to ourselves, it appears that a person who had so far overcome the common prejudices of his countrymen as

to acknowledge the superior excellency of the love of God and our neighbour to the most ostentatious acts of outward worship—burnt offerings and sacrifice—that a person of this turn and temper of mind was not far from the kingdom of God.

From all these texts laid together, we may venture to deliver it positively as our Saviour's doctrine, and, consequently as a matter of absolute certainty to us, that all hopes and attempts to please or pacify God, by outward piety and devotion, so long as we take upon us to transgress the laws of virtue and morality, are vain and groundless; and his repeating this doctrine so often, and on so many different occasions, shows the stress he laid upon it, and how solicitous he was to have it rightly understood.

I will add to these a passage from the Old Testament, and which goes to prove that acts of worship, done in the manner and with the views we are speaking of, that is, to atone or make up for the neglect or breach of moral duties, are so far from being at all pleasing or acceptable to God, that they are regarded by him only as so much mockery of him—are odious and abominable to him. It is in the 1st chapter of Isaiah, and God is himself speaking to the Jews by the mouth of that prophet: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, and of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new

moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." This passage is very remarkable. Sacrifices, burnt-offerings, oblations, incense, the feast of the new moons, sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, were all what God himself had commanded to the Jews. They were of his own appointing. Yet how does he speak of them in the place before us? "To what purpose is the multitude of sacrifices? I am full of burnt offerings; I delight not in the blood of bullocks; your oblations are vain; incense is an abomination; your new moons and your feasts my soul hateth: I am weary of them." And whence was all this? How came this change, as one may say, in God's esteem and opinion of these ordinances? He tells them, "Your hands are full of blood;" and what were they to do to make God again propitious to their services? How were they then to make their acts of religion again acceptable to him? He tells them this also: "Cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." So the very acts of worship and devotion which God himself had commanded, when they were made to stand in the place of justice, mercy, humanity, and the like—when they served as an excuse for neglecting or breaking through moral duties, became detestable in his sight.

The point we set out with was, that acts of outward

piety and devotion signify nothing unless accompanied with real inward virtue and goodness; that they will in no wise make up for the neglect of moral duties; that they afford in the sight of God, I mean, no sort of reason or excuse for the practice of actual vice; and I think we have proved them to be our Saviour's doctrine to a demonstration, as well as what God himself had declared to the Jews long before our Saviour's time.

XIV.

FAST-DAY.

PSALM XXII. 28.

The kingdom is the Lord's, and he is the governor among the nations.

THE doctrine conveyed to us in these words is that of a *national providence:* and it is a doctrine no less agreeable to reason than comfortable to the human mind. It must, therefore, afford us the highest satisfaction to find this truth confirmed by the sacred writers, in the clearest and the strongest terms. The Scriptures are full of the most gracious promises to righteous nations, and of the most dreadful denunciations against wicked and impenitent kingdoms; and it is well known that neither these promises nor these threatenings were vain.

The history of the Jewish people (more especially) is scarce any thing else than the history of God's providential interposition to punish or reward them according as they obeyed or disobeyed his laws. And although we should admit that, on account of the peculiar circumstances of that people, and the unexampled form of their government, this case cannot be fairly compared with that of other nations, yet there are not wanting some which may. In the ancient world, there were four celebrated empires which rose one after another, and successively filled the age with astonishment

and terror; yet these, it appears, were nothing more than mighty instruments in the hand of God, to execute his various dispensations of mercy, or of justice, on the Jewish or other nations; and to prepare the way gradually for the introduction of another kingdom of a very different nature, and superior to them all. Their rise and fall were predicted in the sacred writings (by Daniel most especially, chapter 7, 8,) long before they existed; and some extraordinary characters, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, and others, were, though unknown to themselves, the instruments of the Almighty, raised up at certain appointed times, and furnished with great power, as well as with other qualifications, to perform all his pleasure and fulfil his views: "I am the Lord that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; that frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; that confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messenger. I form the light and create darkness. I make peace and create evil. I the Lord do all these things." Thus we see that what is considered as the common vicissitude of human affairs—peace and war—pestilence and famine—political changes and national revolutions—the passions of the wicked—the virtues of the good—the shining qualities of the great; every thing, in short, that the world calls accident, chance, and fortune, are all, in fact, under the control of an invisible and over-ruling hand; which, without any violation of the laws of nature, or the freedom of human actions, renders them subservient to the gracious purposes of divine wisdom in the government of the world.

We of this kingdom have been most remarkably

favoured with the visible protection of Heaven; and there are in our own history so many marks of a divine interference, that if we do not acknowledge it, we are either the blindest or the most ungrateful people on earth. Let me more particularly call your attention to the following very singular circumstances in some of the greatest events that have happened in this country.

Our separation from the church of Rome was begun by the passions of a prince, who meant nothing in the world less than *that* reformation of religion which was the consequence of it. The total dispersion and overthrow of what was profanely called the *invincible* armada was effected almost entirely by winds and tempests. That dreadful popish conspiracy, which seemed guarded by darkness and silence against all possibility of detection, was at last casually discovered by an indiscreet and obscure letter. At a time when there appeared no hope of ever recovering our ancient form of government, it suddenly rose from the ruins in which the tragedy of those times had involved it, under the direction of a man who had helped to destroy it, and who seemed almost to the last moment undecided whether he should restore or destroy it again.

Our deliverance in the following reign from the attempts of a gloomy tyrant to enslave both body and soul was brought about by the concurrence of the most surprising incidents, co-operating, at the critical moment upon which the whole depended, with the noblest efforts of true patriotism.

These are a few remarkable facts selected from a multitude of others, scarce less extraordinary; and they bear evident traces stamped upon them of a superior power.

Now it may appear to some, that the *calamities* which

at various times have befallen our nation were a contradiction to the doctrine here advanced; were a strong and melancholy proof that God's providential care was then at least withdrawn, and the light of his countenance turned away from this island. But it is not, surely, to be expected, that throughout the whole duration of a great empire, any more than throughout the whole life of an individual, there is to be one uninterrupted course of prosperity and success. Admonitions and checks, corrections and punishments, may be, and undoubtedly are, in both cases useful, perhaps essentially necessary; and the care and even kindness of Providence may be no less visible in these salutary severities than in the distribution of its most valuable blessings.

Both private and public afflictions have a natural tendency to awaken, to alarm, to instruct, and to better the heart of man; and they may be at last attended with other very important and beneficial consequences.

We have then the strongest reason to conclude that there is a power on high which watches over the fate of nations; and which has, in a more especial manner, preserved this kingdom, in the most critical and perilous circumstances. Does not this, then, afford some ground to hope, that, if we endeavour to render ourselves worthy of the divine protection, it will be once more extended to us; and that, by a speedy and effectual reformation of our hearts and lives, we may remove or lighten the judgement which our iniquities have drawn down upon us? We may be allowed to console ourselves with those reviving hopes, which the belief of God's providential government presents to us. We know in whom we trust; we know that this trust rests on a foundation which cannot be shaken. It rests not

only on the express declarations and promises of holy writ, but on the many remarkable instances of a divine agency, which occur in the history of mankind, and above all in our own. In every one of the extraordinary national deliverances above-mentioned, the dangers that threatened this island were of a much greater magnitude, and more formidable aspect, than any which seem at this time to hang over us. Why then may we not indulge ourselves with the same expectations? A series of past favours naturally begets a presumption of their continuance; and it must not be wholly imputed to the partiality which every man entertains for his own country if we give way to a persuasion that God will still vouchsafe his accustomed goodness to his favoured land. We will soothe ourselves with the belief that a nation so distinguished as this hath been, with happier revolutions and greater blessings than any other ever experienced, will not at this time be deserted by its gracious benefactor and protector. Compared with the nations of Europe, it is not too much to say, that it is here that liberty hath fixed her seat. If it can be pretended (after all it is difficult to prove) that any other country possesses more liberty, they do not possess tranquillity along with it. It is here that Protestantism finds its firmest support —it is here that the principle of religious toleration is established—it is here that a public provision is made for the poor—it is here that public institutions for their relief exist in greater numbers and extent than in any other part of the world. It is here, in short, that the laws are equal—that they are, in general, administered both with integrity and with ability; and that the stream of justice flows with a purity unknown in any other age or nation.

Nor have we only the happiness of enjoying these unspeakable advantages ourselves; we have been the instruments (and it is an honour to have been so, superior to all conquests) of diffusing them over the remotest regions of the globe. Wherever our discoveries, our commerce, or our arms have penetrated, they have in general carried the laws, the freedom, and the religion of this country along with them. Whatever faults and errors we may be chargeable with in other respects, for these gifts at least, the most invaluable that one country can bestow upon another, it is not improbable that both the eastern and the western world may one day acknowledge that they were originally indebted to this kingdom. Is it then a vain imagination, that, after having been made the instrument of Providence for such beneficial purposes, there is some degree of felicity yet in reserve for us; and that the part we are appointed to act in the world is not yet accomplished? What may be in the councils of the Most High—what mighty changes he may be now meditating in the system of human affairs—he alone can tell. But in the midst of this awful suspense, while the fate of empires hangs on his resolves, of one thing at least we are absolutely certain, that it is better to have him for our friend than our enemy; which of the two he shall be depends entirely upon ourselves. If, by our impiety and our licentiousness, we audaciously insult his admonitions and brave his vengeance, what else can we expect but that every thing which ought naturally to be the means of our stability will be converted into instruments of our destruction? If, on the contrary, by reverencing the judgements of God, and returning to that submission which we owe him, we again put ourselves under his protection, he may still,

as he has often done, dispel the clouds that hang over us; or if, for wise reasons, he suffer them to gather and darken upon us; he may make even them, in the final result, conduce to our real welfare.

There is in fact no calamity, private or public, which, under his gracious direction, may not eventually prove a blessing. There are no losses but that of his favour which ought to sink us into despair. There is a spirit in freedom, there is a confidence in religion, which will enable those who possess them, and those only, to rise superior to every disaster. It is not a boundless extent of territory, nor even of commerce, that is essential to public prosperity. They are necessary, indeed, to national greatness, but not to national happiness. The true wealth, the true security of a kingdom, consists in frugality, industry, unanimity, loyalty, and piety. Great difficulties call for great talents and great virtues. It is in times such as these that we look for courage and ability. Let the wise, the good, and the brave, stand forth in the present difficulty as one man, to assist and befriend their country. In the same vessel we are all embarked; if the vessel perish, we must all perish with it. It is, therefore, our common interest, our common duty, to unite in guarding against so fatal an event. There can be no danger of it but from ourselves; let harmony inspire our councils, and religion sanctify our hearts, and we have nothing to fear. Peace abroad is undoubtedly a most desirable object! but there are two things still more so—peace with one another, and peace with God.

XV.

FAST-DAY.

JONAH III. 10.

And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented him of the evil that he said he would do unto them, and he did it not.

BEFORE we proceed with the text, there is one word in it to be observed particularly, which is the word "repent." This word, when applied to God, does not, as when applied to us, denote sorrow or contrition for a deed or intention which was wrong at the time, but it imports that what was fit and right, and so judged to be by divine wisdom, under one state of circumstances and in one situation of the parties concerned, becomes not fit or right under different circumstances and in a new situation: that God accordingly changes his council or design, because the occasions which induced it have also changed, which change of council is in scripture language called "repentance."

In the present instance it is said that God "repented of the evil." That evil was the destruction of Nineveh for its wickedness. "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before me." When this terrible sentence was denounced by the prophet Jonah, the effect which it

appears to have produced very suddenly upon the people was a solid, national penitence. We are not authorized to say that it was a political change (for of that we hear nothing), but a personal reformation, pervading every rank and description of men in that community. "So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them even to the least." The king of Nineveh published, we read, a decree for the strict observation of this religious solemnity, concluding with these pious and remarkable words: "Let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands: who can tell if God will repent and turn from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" The effect was what might be hoped for from the sincerity and universality of their penitence and devotion. "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that he had said he would do unto them, and he did it not." Here, therefore, we have a nation saved by penitence and devotion together; and we are assured, by the authority of this history, that if, from negligence, from contempt, from the pride of reasoning, from philosophical objections, from the hardihood and contumacy of sin, or from the ease and levity, and unconcern and indifference, which licentious prosperity begets, the people had despised the warning of the prophet and the admonition of their king, the event would have been, that Nineveh had sunk and perished for ever.

It is unnecessary to distinguish between devotion and penitence, because one, if sincere, includes or produces the other. From either of them, when insincere, no good can be expected; and if sincere, one includes the other. If devotion be sincere, it must lead to an

amendment of life; and if penitence be sincere, it will universally be accompanied with devotion.

Natural religion has its difficulties upon the subject of prayer; and it is one of the benefits which we derive from revelation, that its instructions, its declarations, its examples under this head are plain, full, and positive. The revelations, which we receive as authentic, supply, in this article, the defect of natural religion. They require prayer to God as a duty, and they contain positive assurances of its efficacy and acceptance. The scripture, also, not only affirms the propriety of prayer in general, but furnishes precepts and examples which justify certain subjects and modes of prayer, which the adherents to natural, in opposition to revealed, religion have sometimes represented as dubious or exceptionable. "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing," that is, let the subject of your fears be what it will; "by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." The true disposition under difficulties is described to be—to serve the Lord; serving the Lord to rejoice in hope; thus acting, not to let our souls sink under misfortune, or relinquish the prospect of better things; hoping for better things, yet patient under the present—patient, as it is expressed, under tribulation; and, to close all, continuing instant in prayer: more particularly, under a sense of danger, what is to be done? why, "Pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass."

Again; although it be granted that prayer is allowable, as far as it expresses a general sense of submission to God, and as far as it casts ourselves upon his mercy or his bounty, yet some have thought that we advanced too far in petitions when we took upon ourselves to

pray for particular favours by name. And this ought at least to be admitted, that our prayers, even when the most particular and most urgent, and drawn from us by the most pressing necessity, are to be conceived and uttered under the reflection and sentiment that we are addressing a being who knows infinitely better than we do what is best, not only for the whole world, but even for us; and further also, we may find some advantage in bearing in mind that, if prayer was suffered to disturb the order appointed by God in the universe too much or too apparently, it would introduce a change into human affairs, which, in some important respects, would be pernicious. Who, for example, would labour, if his necessities could be supplied with equal certainty by prayer? How few would contain within any bounds of moderation those passions or pleasures which at present are checked only by fear of disease, if prayer would infallibly restore health? In short, if the efficacy of prayer, as applicable to this life, were so constant and observable as to be relied on beforehand, and to the exclusion or diminution of our own caution, vigilance, and activity, the conduct of mankind would, in proportion to that reliance, become careless, indolent, and disorderly. However, our prayers may, in many instances, be efficacious, and yet the experience of their efficacy be doubtful and obscure; therefore if the light of nature instruct us, by any arguments, to hope for effect from prayer, still more, if the Scriptures authorize these hopes by precept, by example, or by promises of acceptance, it is not a sufficient reason for calling in question the reality of such effect that we cannot observe this reality, since it appears something more than probable that this doubt about it is necessary to the safety, and order, and happiness of human life.

We have been speaking of praying for particular favours by name, and have remarked that the Scriptures authorize these prayers by example. This they do most explicitly. Hear Saint Paul: "For this thing (some bodily infirmity, which he calls 'a thorn given him in the flesh,' and the example applies to any other sore grief under which we labour), for this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." Also, for the future success of any honest intention or just undertaking, in which we are engaged, we have the same authority for imploring, and with earnestness, the aid and blessing of God—"Night and day praying exceedingly, that we might see your face."

Nay further, it is to be remarked, that we are not only authorized, and even directed by Scripture example, to pray for particular favours by name, but to do so repeatedly and renewedly, even in cases ultimately unsuccessful. We are to do our duty, by addressing ourselves to God under the several difficulties in which we are placed; and having done this, to resign both ourselves and them to his disposal. "I besought the Lord thrice," saith Saint Paul, "that it might depart from me." But yet it was not departed at the time of his writing, nor have we any information that it ever did. Our Lord himself drank the fatal cup to the dregs: it did not depart from him, though his prayer surely was right, and was urged, and renewed, and reiterated, even in the same words.

But this, viz. the renewal of unsuccessful prayer, is with our Lord not only a point of practice, but of doctrine: he not only authorizes it by his example, but enjoins it by his precepts. "He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint." He would not have delivered a parable

upon it if he had not meant both to authorize, recommend, and enjoin it.

But although our own distresses may both excite and justify our own prayers, yet we seem, it is said, to presume too far, when we take upon us to intercede for others, because it is allowing ourselves to suppose that we possess an interest, as it were, in the divine councils. Turn however to the Scripture, and we find intercession or prayers for others both preached and practised. "Pray for one another, that ye may be healed: the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." "God is my witness," saith Saint Paul, "that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers." "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers for me." "Saint Peter was kept in prison, but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." These are strong and decisive examples of intercession, and of one individual interceding for another. The largest and farthest advance in this species of worship is when we take upon us to address the supreme Governor of the universe for public blessings in behalf of our country, or touching the fate of nations and empires. "I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes." Surely this humiliating sentiment belongs to us all. Who feels not, as it were, a check to his prayers when he compares the vileness and insignificance of the petitioner with the magnitude of the favour asked, and with the infinitely exalted nature of the being from whom we ask it? Nevertheless, intercessions for the community, for blessings upon them—for national blessings, both natural and civil—are amongst the conspicuous parts of

both Testaments; not only in examples, which is authority, but in precepts, which is obligation. Are we, as all are, concerned that the blessings of nature may be imparted to our land? "Ask yet of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field." Or are we more especially interested in the continuance of those civil blessings, which give, even to the bounty of nature, no small share of its value and enjoyment? "I exhort that first of all supplication, prayer, intercession, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and for all that are in authority;" and this is in order that "we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." The meaning of this passage is clearly—Pray for them, not for their sakes, either alone or principally, but for the common happiness, that under the protection of a regular government we may practise religion and enjoy tranquillity. "This is good," saith the apostle, "and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour." "O pray for the peace of Jerusalem, for there is the seat of judgement, even the seat of the house of David: for my brethren and companion's sake I will wish thee prosperity, yea, because of the house of the Lord God, I will seek to do thee good." Jerusalem was to the Psalmist what our country is to us, the seat of his affections, his family, his brethren, and companions, his laws, religion, and his temple. But again, must we look to seasons of calamity and visitation; have we not the father of the faithful interceding face to face with the divine messenger for a devoted land? "O let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this time." Or rather, because the piety of the patriarch was unsuccessful, hear the leader and lawgiver of the Jewish

nation effectually supplicating for his threatened and offending, but now penitent followers: "Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people? remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants. And the Lord repented of the evil which he had thought to do unto his people." Or, lastly, let us attend him in the most solemn of all devotions, which seem to have been performed in the history of the world, in that sublime prayer which he offered up in behalf of his country: "If they pray towards this place and confess thy name, and turn from their sin when thou afflictest them, then hear thou in heaven, thy dwelling-place; and when thou hearest, forgive: forgive the sin of thy servants and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way, wherein they should walk. If thy people go out to battle against their enemy, whithersoever thou shalt send them, and shall pray unto the Lord toward the city which thou hast chosen, and toward the house that I have built for thy name, then hear thou in heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause."

XVI.

FAST DAY.

PROVERBS XIV. 34.

Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

THERE are many propositions, which, though they be reasonable and true in themselves, and acknowledged to be so, make very little impression upon our minds. They glide through our thoughts without effect, and without leaving a trace behind them. Yet, the self-same propositions, when they are brought back to our reflection by any experience, or by any incident that falls under our observation—especially any in which we ourselves are concerned—shall be found to have a weight, a justice, a significancy in them which they never appeared to possess before. This seems to be the case with the words of Solomon which I have now read to you. That "righteousness exalteth a nation" is one of those moral maxims which no man chooses to contradict. Every hearer assents to it; but it is an assent without meaning—there is no value or importance or application perceived in the words. But when such things happen as have happened; when we have seen, and that at our doors, a mighty empire falling from the summit of what the world calls grandeur to the very abyss and bottom, not of external weakness, but of internal misery and distress, and that for want of virtue and of religion in the inhabitants, on one side

probably as well as on the other, we begin to discover that there is not only truth, but momentous instruction in the text, when it teaches us that it is "righteousness which exalteth a nation." It is virtue, and virtue alone, which can make either nations happy or governments secure.

France wanted nothing but virtue; and by that want she fell. If the fairest region of Europe, if a numerous population, if the nominal wealth which arises from the money of a country, if large foreign possessions, if armies and fleets, if a splendid court and nobility, could have given firmness to a state, these were all possessed by her to a degree which hardly, I believe, any other nation could pretend to. Her fate, therefore, is, and ought to be, a standing lesson to the world that something more than external prosperity is necessary; and that something is—internal goodness and virtue.

I know not how I can employ the present solemn occasion, and the still more solemn admonition which the transactions that have lately gone on, and are still going on in the world, ought to convey to us, better than by illustrating the assertion of the text—that it is by the people being good, and by that alone, that any country can be happy, or any government safe.

And first of all, I would observe to you, that whatever new opinions have sprung up in France—and of some of which they have learnt the effects by sore experience—the wisest men of the last age, in that very country—men also firmly and boldly attached to public liberty—have said this: that the principles of Christianity are more favourable to good government than any principles of any philosopher or politician can be. For the celebrated French writer to whom I allude,

after stating exactly what sort of a principle was suited to a monarchy, what to an aristocracy, and what to a republic, concludes by declaring—that although there be principles proper to each form of government, the principles of the Christian religion, so far as it prevailed, are better, more useful, and more effectual than them all.

And in my judgement our author, in saying that, has said no more than what reason will bear him out in.

The true Christian must be a good subject; because having been accustomed to fix his eyes and hopes upon another world, a future state of existence, "a more abiding city," "a tabernacle not of this building," his first care concerning the present state of things is to pass quietly and peaceably and innocently through it. Now this is the very disposition to be desired in human society; it is the disposition which keeps each man in his station, and what is more, keeps him contented with it. A man upon whom Christianity hath shed this temper can never wish for disturbance, because he cannot wish to have that calm and even course of life broken up, by going on soberly and peaceably in which, he feels himself doing his duty, and feels from thence the highest of human satisfaction—that he is gradually making himself ready for, and advancing towards, his reward in heaven. He will not have his progress stopped, his journey interrupted. I will not say that no case of public provocation can happen which would move him; but it must be a case clear and strong—it must be a species of necessity. He will not stir until he see a great and good end to be attained; and not indeed a certain, because nothing in human life is so, but a rational and practicable way of attaining it. Nothing extravagant, nothing chimerical, nothing in any considerable degree doubtful, will be deemed a sufficient reason with him

for hazarding the loss of that tranquillity for which he earnestly, for himself at least, desires to pass the days of his sojourning here upon earth. Then as to all ambitious, aspiring views, which are the great annoyance of public peace and order, they are killed and excluded in the heart of a Christian. If he have any ambition, it is the silent ambition of pleasing his Maker: if he aspire to any thing, it is the hope—and yet even that a humble and subdued hope—of salvation after his death. That religion, therefore, by its proper nature generates in the heart a disposition, though never adverse, but always friendly to public order and to good government, inasmuch as public order cannot be maintained in the world without it, is, I think, a general and plain truth, and is confirmed by experience, as well as dictated by reason: for although the name and pretence of religion have at divers times been made the name and pretence of sedition and of unjustifiable insurrection against established authority, religion itself never was.

But secondly: religion is not only a source and support of national happiness, but the only source and support to be relied on. I mean, that there arise such vicissitudes and revolutions in human affairs, that nothing but this can be expected to remain, or is adapted to the changes which the course of this world is sure to bring along with it. To expect always to continue in health would be a most unreasonable expectation in any man living; and to possess a temper of mind which would be pleased and easy whilst we were well, but which could bear neither pain nor sickness, would be a very unsuitable temper, a very poor provision of spirits to go through the world with. It is just so in civil life. To be quiet whilst all things go on well; to be pleased in prosperity; not to complain when we thrive; not to

murmur or accuse amidst affluence and plenty, is a state of mind insufficient to meet the exigencies of human affairs. Great varieties and alterations, both of personal and natural condition, will inevitably take place: rich men will become poor, and the poor will become distressed, and this whatever course of prosperity a nation seeks. If a people go into trade and manufactures, innumerable accidents will fall out in the circumstances either of the country itself, or of other countries with which it is connected (for it depends upon *them* also), that must check and interrupt the progress and extent of its commerce. No wisdom hath ever yet been able to prevent these changes, or ever can. If the cultivation of the soil be more followed, and trade less so; still, though the public security be greater, the security of individuals is not greater. A harsh season, a storm, a flood, a week or even a day of unfavourable weather, may spoil the hopes and profits of a year. Disappointments therefore, and losses, and those to a very great extent, will happen to many. Now there is but one temper which can prepare the mind for changes in our worldly affairs, and that is the temper which Christianity inspires. The Christian regards prosperity at all times, not only as subject to constant peril and uncertainty, but even at the best, and in its securest state (if any state of prosperity can be called secure), regards it as an inferior object of his solicitude; inferior to a quiet conscience, inferior to the most humble endeavours to please God, and infinitely inferior to the prospect of future salvation. The consequence of viewing worldly prosperity in this light—which is the safest and truest light in which it can be seen—is that the Christian uses it when it falls to his lot with moderation; considers it as a trust, as a talent committed to him;

as adding to his anxiety, and increasing his obligation to do good, and thereby bringing with it a burden and accountableness which almost overbalances its value. And for the same reason that he uses the good things of life temperately and cautiously whilst they are his, he parts from them, or sees the diminution of them, with equanimity. When he had them, he was far from making or considering them as instruments of luxury, indulgence, or ostentation; least of all, of intemperance and excess. Now therefore that he has them not, he has none of those pernicious gratifications to resign. Whatever be a man's worldly estate, a true Christian sees in it a state of probation, of trial, of preparation, of passage. If it be a state of wealth and plenty, it is only that; if it be a state of adversity, it is still the same: the only difference is, whether he come at last "out of the fire," tried by the temptations of prosperity or by the strokes of misfortune and the visitations of want; and he who acquits himself as he ought in one condition will be equally accepted and equally approved, as he who acquits himself as he ought in the other. We are wont to admire the rich man who conducts himself with humility and liberality, studying to spread and diffuse happiness and goodness around him;—and he is deserving of praise and admiration: but I must be allowed to say, that the poor man, who, in trying circumstances, in times of hardship and difficulty, carries himself through with patience, sobriety, and industry, and, so far as he can, with contentment and cheerfulness, is a character not at all beneath the other in real merit; not less entitled to the esteem of good men—but whether he receive that or otherwise, not less entitled to hope for the final favour of God.

Having seen, therefore, how beneficially religion acts upon personal characters and personal happiness, it only remains to point out how, through the medium of personal character, it influences public welfare.

Disputes may and have been carried on, both with good and with evil intentions, about forms and constitutions of government; but one thing in the controversy appears clear—that no constitution can suit bad men, men without virtue and without religion; because, let such men live under what government they will, the case with them must ever be this,—if they be born to, or happen to meet with greatness and riches, they fall into dissipation, dissoluteness, and debauchery; and then, if either the experience of vice, or any accident of fortune, deprives them of the means of continuing their courses, they become desperately miserable, and being so, are ready to promote any mischief or any confusion. On the contrary, let power and authority be granted to honest and religious men, they exercise that power without hurting any one, without breaking in upon any reasonable enjoyment, or any reasonable freedom; without either plundering the rich, or grinding the poor; by affording a protection to one as well as the other equally strong and equally prompt, and, so far as human means can do it, or as civil institutions can do it, by rendering both happy in their stations.

XVII.

ON THE NEW YEAR.

ROM. XIII. 11.

And that knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

I HAVE made choice of this text, both because I always thought it a solemn and affecting piece of Scripture, and because it appears well calculated to raise in us a train of reflections suitable to the beginning of a new year. The Apostle, we observe, is speaking to converts—that is, to those who were converted from heathenism to Christianity, after they were come to years of discretion. Some of these, it is probable, did not at once change their course of life with their religion, but continued in that state of sin and sensuality,—of insensibility to the calls of conscience and duty, which Saint Paul frequently terms a state of sleep, of night, and of darkness.

The Apostle, in the text, tells them if they did not when they first believed—when they first took up the profession of Christianity—awaken out of their former sleep, out of their negligence and security about their conduct, it is now, at least, high time that they should; "for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." A length of time has elapsed; we are draw-

ing considerably nearer to the term and period which is to fix our everlasting destiny than when we first embraced the faith of Christ. It has been supposed, and with probability, that Saint Paul expected the coming of Christ to be not far off, and this expression, "now is our salvation nearer," alluded to that coming; which being, as they thought, to happen soon, now drew sensibly nearer every day. These two particularities, the computing the date from the time that they became converts, and their expecting the coming of Christ to take place soon, though they clear up the meaning of the words, do not make them so strictly and precisely applicable to us; but the general doctrine, the great and solemn admonition contained in them, is still as much for us to lay to heart, as suitable to our circumstances and religious condition, as it was to theirs to whom the letter was written. The time of any man's death is to him the time of his salvation; that is, the time when his destiny in another life is fixed: and we are taught by the text to reflect that we are hastening very fast to that period; that every year draws us sensibly and considerably nearer to it. Then for this reason it is high time, if we have not already done it, to awake out of sleep; to shake off that dulness and insensibility to religious matters which cleaves to our souls; to rouse ourselves to virtue and to action; to have done with these wild and distempered dreams of worldly pleasures and pursuits, which have hitherto influenced us, and to open our eyes as one just awake from a sleep to views of heaven and of hell; to a sight of our real business in this world, to making sure of a favourable sentence at the day of judgement. This meditation I think extremely suitable to the beginning of a new year. One year more, my brethren, has

brought us nearer to our salvation—nearer to the term that is to fix us for ever. We now enter upon another year, and it surely is a proper opportunity to pause—to consider for a while whence we came, where we are, whither we are going, what we are about, what we have to look for. And first, they who suffer year after year to pass over their heads without any serious thoughts, or any serious endeavours after their immortal interests, know or consider little what a year is. A year is a very material portion of the whole time we have for our work. We talk of seventy or eighty years, but how few ever reach that number! The youngest, the strongest, the healthiest man living cannot be allowed to reckon upon more than thirteen or fourteen years: I mean, in worldly transactions. The very best life, and one in the very bloom and vigour of age, is not expected to be much more than that: for the generality of us, that is, for five out of six of all who are not the youngest, not half that. Let it then sink into our thoughts that a year is probably the sixth or the seventh part of all the term we have before us; that a year neglected is one step lost or gone backward in the business of salvation, and that such steps are but few. And it may show us the value and the consequence of a single year to look back upon the last, to recollect what changes it has made, what alterations it has produced in our neighbourhood, or amongst our acquaintance: that of those with whom we have met together, sat, and conversed, several are gone down into the grave: that the time of trial is over with them—the opportunity of salvation closed and finished for ever: that death is abroad and amongst us; that our turn is near, that it cannot be distant; that when we

see what one year has produced around us, we cannot but reflect in many ways what another may bring to ourselves. Is this a time to sleep? is this a proper situation to be dreaming about gains and pleasures, and advantages, which will all cease and perish with us; whilst death and judgement, and the sentence of God Almighty at the last day, are unthought of and neglected? It is a practice with many, in the arrangement of their worldly concerns, to settle at every year's end their accounts, to inquire how their affairs stand, to see what improvement they have made, as well as what faults and mistakes they have committed; to know whether they go backwards or forwards—wherein they chiefly fail, what they are to set to rights, and how they may proceed with more safety and advantage the next year.

This is a general thing, and a good thing; insomuch as they who do not use something of this sort seldom, I think, thrive or succeed well. Now I would earnestly recommend a similar proceeding in our religious concerns. I am sure there is infinitely greater reason for it; because our being saved or perishing everlastingly is of infinitely greater consequence to every one of us than any other thing we can possibly gain or lose here.

Now this being the case, I cannot employ the remainder of this discourse better than by suggesting such topics for this annual self-examination as may appear most necessary and most important to be inquired into. And first, I would speak to those who are sunk in habits of sottishness and sensuality—who have given themselves up to a life of drunkenness, debauchery, riot, and disorder; which, if the Bible can be depended upon, must, without a sincere repentance and reforma-

tion, bring your souls to final destruction. We adjure, we warn, and admonish you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, trust not to another year. You may not live through this. Amuse not yourselves with false calculations of long life. Old age is the lot of few, of very few indeed—not of one in a thousand who addict themselves to these things—to vice and unlawful courses. You suppose you shall be alive at the beginning of next year. You will have the same work to do as at this. You will have less ability, less inclination, more confirmed habits, more tyrannical propensities to conquer. To repent to any purpose you will have greater difficulty, greater pain, greater struggles. What ground is there to expect that if your resolutions yield now, they should be able to stand stedfast then?

In the second place, let me address a word to such as have spent the last year, and their past life, in a total neglect and forgetfulness of all religious concerns; who may be truly said to sleep in darkness and insensibility. Consider the time. Another year is gone: a sixth or a seventh part of the whole, you can reckon your lives worth, is just departed. Open your eyes to the light. Awaken to a sense of your situation—to a knowledge of what you are, and whither you are going. It is your own affair—your own interest. Your own welfare and salvation are at stake. Things, you find, do come to pass. The silent but irresistible progress of time brings events home, which you have been accustomed to regard as at a vast distance. Perhaps one, certainly a few, of such years as that which is gone, will bring you to death and to judgement, whether you have thought of these things or not.

The exhortation to other Christians I would found upon the principle, that the true Christian's life is a state of continual progress—a constant growing in grace; a gradual amendment of ourselves, either by shaking off bad qualities or acquiring good ones, or most commonly and most naturally by both together. Now in this view, what has the last year done for us? What virtues have we planted in our hearts? What vices have we exterminated? Have we gone backwards or forwards? Is our moral character better or worse? Have we fought a good fight? Have we practised a steady opposition to the enemies of our salvation, to the allurements of the world, the flesh, and the devil? If we have gained one point, if we have advanced one step, if we perceive the smallest improvement in our principles and conduct, it is a high encouragement to quicken our speed, to redouble our endeavours. The hill which we climb is steepest at the bottom. The first advances in the way of virtue are most slow and most laborious. Let us not faint or desist. We shall soon add virtue to virtue—cut down one vice after another. We shall, ere long, begin to taste and to relish the satisfaction, the joys, the hopes of religion.

On the other hand, if we find that we are sinking more and more under temptation—our good principles daily giving way—our old sins grown more confirmed and irresistible, and new ones making their appearance in us, it is time to take the alarm. Another such year may ruin us for everlasting. Our case will bear no delay. We must set about it immediately, if we intend it at all, with firmness—with resolution—with perseverance. Let us then search out our condition to the bottom. Have we the last year managed our earthly

affairs with scrupulous honesty, and truth, and fair dealing, or have we, in any instance, for the sake of any advantage to ourselves, taken in, overreached, or gone beyond any man? Have our transgressions and trespasses, as to sobriety and purity, been more or less frequent this last year than heretofore? Are we growing better in this respect, or worse? How shall we better withstand temptation for the future?—or what course shall we take to avoid it? Do we feel, more or less frequently, fits of anger, rage, and passion? Have we striven against them? Have we striven to any purpose? In what degree have we conquered or corrected them; or how shall we set about to do it? Are peevishness, envy, discontent, strife, malice, hatred, covetousness, more or less rife and strong in our hearts of late than they used to be? What evil actions, what evil speakings have they of late put us upon? what quarrels, what contentions have they drawn us into? Have we endeavoured to get the better of these evil passions? Have our endeavours been successful? Have they been sincere and continued? Do we feel peace, and quietness, and humility, and good-nature, and good-will? Have any impressive and lively lessons been spreading and gaining ground on our hearts? In a word, has the past year been distinguished by any virtuous acts and virtuous endeavours—any bad habits broken and got the better of—any good rule of living begun?

I trust, and I believe, that many of us will find, in the review of the past, enough to comfort and encourage us. Many, no doubt, will find much to mortify, much to abase, much to humble them; but we shall all find enough to be done for the future.

Let us then awake out of sleep. Let us set about

the reformation of our lives immediately. Let a new year begin a new course. Let us reflect that a year more is now gone—that the time is far spent—that now is our salvation drawing nearer—that a single year brings us nearer to the awful trial when our destiny will be fixed: nearer, not by a small and inconsiderable degree, but by a very serious and substantial portion of the whole term which we, any of us, reasonably expect to live.

XVIII.

SUNDAY SCHOOLS.

2 CHRONICLES XX. 13.

And all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.

IN a great and solemn act of national devotion, which was held during the pious reign of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, upon the occasion of a public danger which then threatened their country, we read that Judah gathered themselves together to ask help of the Lord; even out of all the cities of Judah, they came to seek the Lord.

Had we read no more than that Judah was gathered together, we should have been led perhaps to conclude that the assembly was made up of the king, the magistrates, and the priesthood; the heads of tribes, the masters of families, the principal persons, the aged, or at the lowest, the adult, inhabitants of the country. But the words of the text which have been read to you convey a more circumstantial, and, I think, very observable account of this great religious concourse. By them we are distinctly told, that not only those whom we have before enumerated formed the congregation which stood before the Lord, but that, together with the great body of the Jewish nation, were present also their little ones, their wives, and their children. This is a direct and decisive example for the proof of the following points; namely, the propriety and the duty

of bringing children to the public worship of God, as an act of piety and devotion on the part of those who bring them. It is an example also of very high authority, and of an authority which is strengthened by every circumstance in the history. The assembly appears to have been held in pursuance of the prayer of Solomon many ages before—that when any distress should overtake the nation, they should find their refuge in the protection of their God, when they sought it in his Temple. This prayer was accepted; and it was particularly remembered upon the occasion of which we are now discoursing. "If when evil cometh upon us," say they, "as the sword, judgement, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house and thy presence—for thy name is in this house—and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help."

Afterwards it is related, as we have remarked, who they were that stood before that house and in God's presence; "even all Judah, with their little ones, their wives, and their children." Now the little ones and the children were there, not probably for any knowledge they could be supposed to have of the nature or extremity of the public danger, nor consequently for any part they could immediately and personally take in the subject or the devotion of the meeting, but as a proof and expression, an act and testimony of the public piety, and of the particular piety of those who brought them thither.

The service was accepted by that being to whom it was addressed. The manner of it, therefore, was such as he approved. "Thou wilt hear," they said, "and help." God did hear and help them most effectually; their enemies were smitten and overthrown; the very people who had thus assembled in terror and suppli-

cation returned soon after to Jerusalem to bless the Lord who had delivered them.

Whether, therefore, we regard the solemnity or the effect of this religious act, we see in it a pattern for our imitation, because we see in it that which, it is evident from the consequence, was favourably received by the God of Israel—who is our God, as he is of the whole human race. And indeed, what act of piety can be more natural or more becoming than to draw out in the presence of God, and to bring forward in his service, the youth of the country, whom his providence has given and committed to our care? It is an act, as hath already been observed, which doth not simply respect them, but us; it is our piety, rather than theirs. It is but little that the best can do towards testifying their gratitude to the supreme Benefactor, their love, their zeal, their reverence: I mean, that it is very little when compared with the immensity of the obligation, the dignity of his nature, the sense of our dependence. What therefore we can, we ought. What, however imperfect, he has been pleased to approve; what, however unworthy of him, he has condescended to accept, we surely should be willing to imitate—we should rejoice to pay. When their parents brought young children to Christ that he should touch them, the action was very graciously received by him: he showed manifestly, as well by his behaviour as by his discourse upon the occasion, that he approved of what was done; but it was not the children's piety—they were ignorant and unconscious of what was passing; yet did not this hinder our Lord from being pleased with the service. It was the service, thought, and piety of those who brought the children, and not the children's own, to

which he had respect; it was their motive, their affection, which he viewed. Even the bringing of children to baptism, beside the nature of the ordinance as an instituted right for the initiation of the infants themselves, is an act of worship, an expression of homage and devotion on the part of the parents. This, I take it, is a just and scriptural way of considering the subject, and we hope it will be so accepted. Upon the same principle, the bringing of children to church, beside the use of it to themselves, is an office of piety in those who do it. It is an office which springs from piety as its motive; which hath God, his pleasure, his worship, his honour, in view. There neither is, nor ever was, a parent touched with the love of God, or with any serious apprehensions upon religious subjects, who was content with attending public worship himself, without endeavouring to bring along with him his household and his children. No doubt, it is primarily and properly the duty of parents to undertake this charge: but so it is, that many parents want the attention, the thought, the care, the inclination necessary to this work; want, perhaps, a sense and knowledge of its importance, and of their own duty with relation to it; want sobriety, seriousness, and regularity of behaviour too much themselves, to inculcate these qualities, or any thing which belongs to these qualities, into the minds of their children; and some, we are ready to allow, want opportunities. To make provision for these cases, and that children under such circumstances may stand before the Lord, as the language of the Old Testament so often and well expresses it, the benevolence of others must be exerted; and in whatever degree it is the duty of the parents, when they have in all respects the power

and the opportunity to bring their children to church, in the same degree it is an act of rational and acceptable piety to supply the power and the opportunity where they are not, as well as to furnish inducement and encouragement where there is want of will.

I contend therefore, and I conceive that I am authorized by Scripture to contend, that the bringing of children to the public worship of God is an act of public worship in us, and such a one as we have good reason to believe will be well pleasing to him. This is a distinct and original reason for the beneficence we now solicit: but no doubt, one great consideration upon the subject is the advantage to the children themselves.

Were man a purely rational creature, that is, was he directed in all things by unprejudiced reason alone, or could any plan or system of management make him so, it might be argued very forcibly, that in religious and moral subjects he ought to be left to the free and unbiassed opinion which he might form when he came of sufficient age; and that no influence whatever should be exerted upon the tender and unripe understandings of youth. But neither this proposal, nor any proposal which proceeds upon the supposition of mankind being guided solely by their reason, accords with the actual condition of human life. Man is made up of habits and prejudices—it is the constitution of his nature; and being so, the only choice which is left us is, whether we will have good prejudices or bad ones; salutary habits, or habits which are pernicious: for the one or the other will infallibly gain possession of the character.

To which must be added another powerful consideration—that the tendency, not of human nature, but of human nature placed in the midst of vicious and corrupt examples, is almost always to the worse. Instances

are but too numerous, where well-educated children as they grow up fall off, decline as they come into the world from their early principles, grievously disappoint the hopes that have been entertained of them; but the cases are very rare in which the man or woman turn out good where the child was bad; where uncurbed, neglected, impious youth ends in any thing better than profligate life. Therefore, to give to men even the chance of becoming virtuous, and by being virtuous happy, all endeavours are requisite to impress good habits, as the only possible means of excluding bad ones.

To apply these general considerations to the particular subject of Sunday Schools.—Without entering into any question, which is by no means necessary here, concerning the degree of strictness with which the Sabbath ought to be kept, it is confessed by all who bear or wish to bear the name of Christians, that it ought to be a day of rest, yet of quietness, order, and sobriety; of some exercise, at least, of religious worship, and at least of some attention to religious concerns. How will it be believed, or can it be expected, that youth, who spend their Sundays in a total contempt of these things, and in the company of those who contemn them; in rude play, in stupid sloth, in riotous and barbarous sports, in noisy and profane society; hearers, though they themselves do not share in them, of almost every species of bad discourse: is it, I say, likely that children, who have been accustomed to spend their Sundays in this manner, when they become men will spend them as they ought to do? And perhaps there are few situations to which these remarks are more applicable than those of frequented sea-ports. In the tranquillity of a country village, children who are not

at church may be harmlessly engaged; but where dangerous examples, where loose conversation, and bad companions, the means, the opportunities, the incentives to vice, abound so much as they do in crowded places and in places connected with a seafaring life, it is greatly to be feared that if children and young persons be not engaged in what is good, they will be engaged in wickedness; that they are not merely absent from the duty and the place where they ought to be, but they are present at scenes which must go near to destroy all the seeds and elements of virtue within them. It may be true, that of those who by their parents or the public are brought to church in their youth, some show very little proofs of being affected or benefited by it. But this is nothing more than what may be said of every plan of education. The best oftentimes fails. As concerning education, therefore, the proper question is—Do those who have no education succeed? and not Does every one that has it make a right use of it? So in this article of bringing children to church, the first inquiry is, whether those who never come to church in their youth will do so when they are grown up; and whether this might not have been the case with multitudes, if they had not been beholden to these institutions.

Then as to another objection—that children just perhaps rising out of infancy are incapable of understanding much of what is going on at church. The objection, in the first place, does not belong to the children who are brought to church by this institution, more than it did to the little ones, and the children, whom Jehoshaphat assembled in the congregation of Judah, or to the children who were presented to Christ: and we know that in neither of these two cases did the reason hinder its being an accepted service, in their view

who brought them. In the next place, the objection is alleged without a sufficient knowledge of human life. It is not only possible, but it is in the ordinary course of things, that men retain from reason and principle what they at first acquired by habit, and under the influence of authority; which yet, if it had not been so acquired, this reason might never have attended to, nor their principles have been excited towards it. Every art and science is at first learnt by rote. Children do not at first know the reason of the rules of grammar or arithmetic; nor is it probable they would ever become grammarians or arithmeticians if they put off learning the practice till they comprehended the proofs. It is afterwards, when they come to employ their own thoughts and their own reflections; when they come to work themselves upon the materials which have previously been laid in by rote, that men of science and learning are formed. A good deal of this observation is true of religion. The principles of Christian knowledge and rules of Christian duty, like all first rules and principles, must be learnt by example and authority. And this is necessary, in order that when men begin to reflect, they may be provided with something to reflect upon; and we trust and believe, that the principles of Christianity are so well founded, that the more men's reason opens and operates, the more they will be inclined to hold fast by their own judgement what they at first received from the instruction of others. Whereas if a man knew nothing of divine worship in his youth, it would be such a strangeness to him afterwards, that if he should happen to enter a church, it would be with a stupid gaze and wonder at what was passing, rather than with any disposition or any capacity to join in it. This would be a defect not to be overcome by reason; because it is

not probable that men's reasoning faculties would be exerted upon a subject from which they were absolutely estranged; it probably therefore would not be overcome at all during the course of the man's life.

I recur to an observation which hath already been stated—that all we can do for the honour of God, the utmost return we can any of us make to him for his unceasing, ill-deserved, and unspeakable mercies, is poor and inadequate to the obligation; yet we are not to sink under the sense of our unworthiness, of the feebleness of our endeavours, of their frequent want of efficacy and success; but on the contrary, just in proportion as they are such, we are to use and exert them to the extent of our power; we are to do our all and our utmost. One mode of testifying our piety toward God is by bringing young persons and children to his worship: it is a mode founded in rational considerations as it respects the children; and as it respects God, it is what we have authority from his Word to say, he himself is pleased to accept and to approve.

I am given to understand that the liberality of the neighbourhood, together with the prudent and praiseworthy attention of those who conduct this charity, afford a prospect of extending its usefulness to some other objects, particularly the establishment of a Day School. I shall only say, that it must be an additional motive to the contributors to know that nothing will be lost; that what can be spared from one good purpose will be applied to another; that if they cast, as the Scripture expresses it, their bread upon the waters, they will, by one channel or another, though after many days, find it again—find it in its effect upon the good and happiness of some one; find it in its reward to themselves.

XIX.

ON FILIAL PIETY.

GENESIS XLVII. 12.

And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to their families.

WHOEVER reads the Bible at all has read the history of Joseph. It has universally attracted attention: and, without doubt, there is not one, but many points in it, which deserve to be noticed. It is a strong and plain example of the circuitous providence of God; that is to say, of his bringing about the ends and purposes of his providence by seemingly casual and unsuspected means. That is a high doctrine, both of natural and revealed religion, and is clearly exemplified in this history. It is a useful example, at the same time, of the protection and final reward of virtue, though for a season oppressed and calumniated, or carried through a long series of distresses and misfortunes. I say, it is a useful example, if duly understood, and not urged too far. It shows the protection of Providence to be *with* virtue under all its difficulties: and this being believed upon good grounds, it is enough; for the virtuous man will be assured that this protection will keep with him in and *through* all stages of his existence—living and dying he is in its hands; and for the same reason that it accompanies him, like an invisible guardian, through [illegible], it will finally recompense him. This is the

true application of that doctrine of a directing Providence, which is illustrated by the history of Joseph, as it relates to ourselves—I mean as it relates to those who are looking forward to a future state. If we draw from it an opinion, or an expectation, that, because Joseph was at length rewarded with riches and honours, therefore we shall be the same, we carry the example further than it will bear. It proves that virtue is under the protection of God, and will ultimately be taken care of and rewarded: but in what manner, and in what stage of our existence—whether in the present or the future, or in both—is left *open* by the example; and both may and must depend upon reasons in a great measure unknown to and incalculable by us.

Again: the history of Joseph is a domestic example. It is an example of the ruinous consequences of partiality in a parent, and of the quarrels and contentions in a family which naturally spring from such partiality.

Again: it is a lesson to all schemers and confederates in guilt, to teach them this truth,—that when their scheme does not succeed, they are sure to quarrel amongst themselves, and to go into the utmost bitterness of mutual accusation and reproach, as the brethren of Joseph, you find, did.

Again: it is a natural example of the effect of adversity, in bringing men to themselves, to reflections upon their own conduct, to a sense and perception of many things, which had gone on, and might have gone on, unthought of and unperceived, if it had not been for some stroke of misfortune which roused their attention. It was after the brethren of Joseph had been shut up by him in prison, and were alarmed, as they well might be, for their lives, that their consciences, so far as it appears, for the first time smote them: "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw

the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear." This is the natural and true effect of judgements in this world, to bring us to a knowledge of ourselves; that is to say, of those bad things in our lives which have deserved the calamities we are made to suffer.

These are all *points* in the history: but there is another point in Joseph's character which I make choice of as the subject of my present discourse; and that is, his dutifulness and affection to his father. Never was this virtue more strongly displayed. It runs like a thread through the whole narrative; and whether we regard it as a quality to be admired, or, which would be a great deal better, as a quality to be imitated by us, so far as a great disparity of circumstances will allow of imitation (which in principle it always will do), it deserves to be considered with a separate and distinct attention.

When a surprising course of events had given to Joseph, after a long series of years, a most unexpected opportunity of seeing his brethren in Egypt, the first question which he asked them was, "Is your father yet alive?" This appears from the account which Reuben gave to Jacob of the conference which they had held with the great men of the country, whilst neither of them, as yet, suspected who he was. Joseph, you remember, had concealed himself during their first journey from the knowledge of his brethren; and it was not consistent with his disguise to be more full and particular than he was in his inquiries.

On account of the continuance of the famine in the land, it became necessary for the brethren of Joseph to go a second time into Egypt to seek corn, and a second time to produce themselves before the lord of the country. What had been Joseph's first question on

the former visit was his first question in this,—"Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake; is *he* yet alive? And they answered, Thy servant, our father, is in good health; he is yet alive. And they bowed down their heads and made obeisance."

Hitherto, you observe, all had passed in disguise. The brethren of Joseph knew nothing who they were speaking to, and Joseph was careful to preserve the secret. You will now take notice how this affected disguise was broken, and how Joseph found himself forced, as it were, from the resolution he had taken, of keeping his brethren in ignorance of his person. He had proposed, you read, to detain Benjamin. The rest being perplexed beyond measure, and distressed by this proposal, Judah, approaching Joseph, presents a most earnest supplication for the deliverance of the child; offers *himself* to remain Joseph's prisoner or slave, in his brother's place; and, in the conclusion, touches, unknowingly, upon a string which vibrates with all the affections of the person whom he was addressing. "How shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father." The mention of this circumstance, and this person, subdued immediately the heart of Joseph, and produced a sudden, and, as it should seem, an undesigned, premature discovery of himself to his astonished family. Then, that is, upon this circumstance being mentioned, Joseph could not refrain himself, and, after a little preparation, Joseph said unto his brethren, "I am Joseph."

The great secret being now disclosed, what was the conversation which immediately followed? The next word from Joseph's mouth was, "Doth my father yet live?" and his brethren could not answer him: surprise

had overcome their faculty of utterance. After comforting, however, and encouraging his brethren, who seemed to sink under the intelligence, Joseph proceeds, "Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: and thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, and there will I nourish thee: (for yet there are five years of famine), lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen: and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither."

It is well known that Jacob yielded to this invitation, and passed over with his family into Egypt.

The next thing to be attended to is the reception which he there met with, from his recovered son. "And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen; and presented himself unto him, and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face; because thou art yet alive." Not content with these strong expressions of personal duty and respect, Joseph now availed himself of his power and station to fix his father's family in the enjoyment of those comforts and advantages which the land of Egypt afforded in the universal dearth which then oppressed that region of the world. For this purpose, as well as to give another public token to his family, and to the country, of the deep reverence with which he regarded his parent, he introduced the aged patriarch to Pharaoh himself. "And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh." The

sovereign of Egypt received a benediction from this venerable stranger. "And Joseph (the account proceeds) nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread according to their families."

It remains to be seen how Joseph conducted himself towards his father, on the two occasions in which alone it was left for him to discharge the office, and testify the affection, of a son; in his sickness, and upon his death. "And it came to pass," we read, "after these things, one told Joseph, behold, thy father is sick: and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim." Joseph delayed not, you find, to leave the court of Pharaoh, the cares and greatness of his station in it, in order to pay the last visit to his dying parent; and to place before him the hopes of his house and family, in the persons of his two sons. "And Israel beheld Joseph's sons, and said, who are these? And Joseph said unto his father, They are my sons, whom God hath given me in this place. And he said, Bring them, I pray thee, unto me, and I will bless them. (Now the eyes of Israel were dim, so that he could not see.) And he brought them near unto him; and he kissed them, and embraced them: and Israel said unto Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face; and, lo! God hath showed me also thy seed. And Joseph brought them out from between his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth." Nothing can well be more solemn or interesting than this interview; more honourable or consoling to old age; or more expressive of the dignified piety of the best of sons, and the greatest of men.

We now approach the last scene of this eventful history, and the best testimony which it was possible

for Joseph to give of the love and reverence with which he had never ceased to treat his father, and that was upon the occasion of his death, and the honours which he paid to his memory; honours, vain, no doubt, to the dead, but, so far as they are significations of gratitude or affection, justly deserving of commendation and esteem. "And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people. And Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him. And Joseph commanded his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father; and the physicians embalmed Israel. And the Egyptians mourned for him threescore and ten days. And Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, and all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father's house: and there went up with him both chariots and horsemen; and it was a very great company. And they came to the threshing-floor of Atad, which is beyond Jordan; and there they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation: and he made a mourning for his father seven days."

Thus died, and thus was honoured in his death, the founder of the Jewish nation; who, amidst many mercies, and many visitations, sudden and surprising vicissitudes of affliction and joy, found it the greatest blessing of his varied and eventful life that he had been the father of a dutiful and affectionate son.

It has been said, and, as I believe, truly, that there is no virtuous quality belonging to the human character, of which there is not some distinct and eminent example to be found in the Bible; no relation in which we

can be placed, no duty which we have to discharge, but that we may observe a pattern for it in the sacred history. Of the duty of children to parents, of a son to his father, maintained under great singularities and variations of fortune, undiminished, nay, rather increased, by absence, by distance, by unexampled success, by remote and foreign connexions, you have seen, in this most ancient of all histories, as conspicuous and as amiable an instance as can be met with in the records of the world, in the purest, best ages of its existence.

XX.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CANAANITES.

JOSHUA X. 40.

So Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel commanded.

I HAVE known serious and well-disposed Christians much affected with the accounts which are delivered in the Old Testament of the Jewish wars and dealings with the inhabitants of Canaan. From the Israelites first setting foot in that country, to their complete establishment in it, which takes up the whole book of Joshua and part of the book of Judges, we read, it must be confessed, of massacres and desolations unlike what are practised now-a-days between nations at war; of cities and districts laid waste, of the inhabitants being totally destroyed,—and this, as it is alleged in the history, by the authority and command of Almighty God. Some have been induced to think such accounts incredible; inasmuch as such conduct could never, they say, be authorized by the good and merciful Governor of the universe.

I intend in the following discourse to consider this matter, so far as to show that these transactions were calculated for a beneficial purpose, and for the general advantage of mankind; and, being so calculated, were

not inconsistent either with the justice of God, or with the usual proceedings of divine Providence.

Now the first and chief thing to be observed is, that the nations of Canaan were destroyed for their wickedness. In proof of this point, I produce the 18th chapter of Leviticus, the 24th and the following verses. Moses, in this chapter, after laying down prohibitions against brutal and abominable vices, proceeds in the 24th verse thus:—"Defile not yourselves in any of these things, for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you, and the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgements, and shall not commit any of these abominations, neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you; for all these abominations have the men of the land done which were before you, and the land is defiled; that the land vomit not you out also, when ye defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you. For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from amongst their people. Therefore shall ye keep my ordinances that ye commit not any of these abominable customs, which were committed before you; and that you defile not yourselves therein." Now the facts, disclosed in this passage, are for our present purpose extremely material and extremely satisfactory. First, the passage testifies the principal point, namely, that the Canaanites were the wicked people we represent them to be; and that this point does not rest upon supposition, but upon proof: in particular, the following words contain an express assertion of the guilt of that people. "In all these the nations are defiled

which I cast out before you; for all these abominations have the men of the land done." Secondly, the form and turn of expression seems to show, that these detestable practices were general amongst them, and habitual: they are said to be abominable *customs* which were committed. Now the word custom is not applicable to a few single or extraordinary instances, but to usage and to national character; which argues, that not only the practice, but the sense and notion of morality was corrupted amongst them, or lost. And it is observable, that these practices, so far from being checked by their religion, formed a part of it. They are described not only under the name of abominations, but of abominations which they have done unto their gods. What a state of national morals must that have been! Thirdly, the passage before us positively and directly asserts that it was for these sins that the nations of Canaan were destroyed. This, in my judgement, is the important part of the inquiry. And what do the words under consideration declare? "In all these," namely, the odious and brutal vices, which had been spoken of, "the nations are defiled, which I cast out before you: and the land is defiled: *therefore* I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it." This is the reason and cause of the calamities which I bring on it. The land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants. The very land is sick of its inhabitants; of their odious and brutal practices; of their corruption and wickedness. This, and no other, was the reason for destroying them. This, and no other, is the reason here alleged. It was not, as hath been imagined, to make way for the Israelites; nor was it simply for their idolatry.

It appears to me extremely probable, that idolatry in those times led, in all countries, to the vices here

described; and also that the detestation, threats, and severities, expressed against idolatry in the Old Testament, were not against idolatry simply, or considered as an erroneous religion, but against the abominable crimes which usually accompanied it. I think it quite certain that the case was so in the nations of Canaan. Fourthly, it appears from the passage before us (and it is surely of great consequence to the question), that God's abhorrence and God's treatment of these crimes were impartial, without distinction, and without respect of nations or persons. The words which point out the divine impartiality are those in which Moses warns the Israelites against falling into any of the like wicked courses; "that the land" says he, "cast not you out also, when you defile it, as it cast out the nations that were before you; for whoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them, shall be cut off from among their people." The Jews are sometimes called the chosen and favoured people of God; and in a certain sense, and for some purposes, they were so: yet is this very people, both in this place and in other places, over and over again reminded, that if they followed the same practices, they must expect the same fate. "Ye shall not walk in the way of the nations which I cast out before you; for they committed all those things, and therefore I abhorred them: as the nations which the Lord destroyed before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye were not obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God."

What farther proves not only the justice but the clemency of God, his long-suffering, and that it was the incorrigible wickedness of those nations which at last drew down upon them their destruction, is, that he suspended, as we may so say, the stroke, till their

wickedness was come to such a pitch, that they were no longer to be endured. In the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, God tells Abraham that his descendants of the fourth generation should return into that country, and not before: "for the iniquity," saith he, "of the Amorites is not yet full." It should seem from hence, that so long as their crimes were confined within any bounds, they were permitted to remain in their country. We conclude, therefore, and we are well warranted in concluding, that the Canaanites were destroyed on account of their wickedness: and that wickedness was perhaps aggravated by their having had amongst them Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—examples of a purer religion and a better conduct; still more by the judgements of God so remarkably set before them in the history of Abraham's family, particularly by the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. At least, these things prove that they were not without warning, and that God did not leave himself without witness among them.

Now when God, for the wickedness of a people, sends an earthquake, or a fire, or a plague amongst them, there is no complaint of injustice, especially when the calamity is known, or expressly declared beforehand, to be inflicted for the wickedness of such people. It is rather regarded as an act of exemplary penal justice, and, as such, consistent with the character of the moral Governor of the universe. The objection, therefore, is not to the Canaanitish nation's being destroyed (for when their national wickedness is considered, and when that is expressly stated as the cause of their destruction, the dispensation, however severe, will not be questioned); but the objection is solely to the manner of destroying them. I mean, there is nothing but the manner left

to be objected to? their wickedness accounts for the thing itself. To which objection it may be replied, that if the thing itself be just, the manner is of little signification even to the sufferers themselves. For where is the great difference, even to them, whether they were destroyed by an earthquake, a pestilence, a famine, or by the hands of an enemy? Where is the difference, even to our imperfect apprehensions of divine justice, provided it be, and is known to be, for their wickedness that they are destroyed? But this destruction, you say, confounded the innocent with the guilty. The sword of Joshua and of the Jews spared neither women nor children. Is it not the same with all other national visitations? Would not an earthquake, or a fire, or a plague, or a famine amongst them have done the same? Even in an ordinary and natural death the same thing happens. God takes away the life he lends, without regard, that we can perceive, to age, or sex, or character. But, after all, promiscuous massacres, the burning of cities, the laying waste of countries, are things dreadful to reflect upon. Who doubts it? so are all the judgements of Almighty God. The effect, in whatever way it shows itself, must necessarily be tremendous, when the Lord, as the Psalmist expresses it, "moveth out of his place to punish the wicked." But it ought to satisfy us—at least this is the point upon which we ought to rest and fix our attention—that it was for excessive, wilful, and forewarned wickedness that all this befell them, and that it is all along so declared in the history which recites it.

But further: if punishing them by the hands of the Israelites rather than by a pestilence, an earthquake, a fire, or any such calamity, be still an objection, we may perceive, I think, some reasons for this method of

punishment in preference to any other whatever; always, however, bearing in our mind, that the question is not concerning the justice of the punishment, but the mode of it. It is well known that the people of those ages were affected by no proof of the power of the gods which they worshiped so deeply as by their giving them victory in war. It was by this species of evidence that the superiority of their own gods above the gods of the nations which they conquered was, in their opinion, evinced. This being the actual persuasion which then prevailed in the world, no matter whether well or ill founded, how were the neighbouring nations, for whose admonition this dreadful example was intended,—how were they to be convinced of the supreme power of the God of Israel above the pretended gods of other nations, and of the righteous character of Jehovah, that is, of his abhorrence of the vices which prevailed in the land of Canaan; how, I say, were they to be convinced so well, or at all, indeed, as by enabling the Israelites, whose God he was known and acknowledged to be, to conquer under his banner, and drive out before them those who resisted the execution of that commission with which the Israelites declared themselves to be invested, viz. the expulsion and extermination of the Canaanitish nations? This convinced surrounding countries, and all who were observers or spectators of what passed: first, that the God of Israel was a real God; secondly, that the gods which other nations worshipped were either no gods, or had no power against the God of Israel; and thirdly, that it was he, and he alone, who possessed both the power and the will to punish, to destroy, and to exterminate from before his face, both nations and individuals, who gave themselves up to the crimes and wickedness for which the Canaanites were

notorious. Nothing of this sort would have appeared, or with the same evidence however, from an earthquake, or a plague, or any natural calamity. These might not have been attributed to divine agency at all, or not to the interposition of the God of Israel.

Another reason which made this destruction both more necessary and more general than it would have otherwise been was the consideration, that if any of the old inhabitants were left, they would prove a snare to those who succeeded them in the country—would draw, and seduce them by degrees into the vices and corruptions which prevailed amongst themselves. Vices of all kinds, but vices most particularly of the licentious kind, are astonishingly infectious: "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." A small number of persons addicted to them, and allowed to practise them with impunity or encouragement, will spread them through the whole mass. This reason is formally and expressly assigned, not simply for the punishment, but for the extent to which it was carried, namely, extermination; "Thou shalt *utterly* destroy them, that they teach you not to do after all their abominations which they have done unto their gods."

To conclude. In reading the Old Testament account of the Jewish wars and conquests in Canaan, and the terrible destruction brought upon the inhabitants thereof, we are constantly to bear in our minds that we are reading the execution of a dreadful, but just sentence, pronounced by God against the intolerable and incorrigible crimes of these nations—that they were intended to be made an example to the whole world of God's avenging wrath against sins of this magnitude and of this kind: sins which, if they had been suffered to continue, might have polluted the whole ancient

economy, in that particular administration of a visible providence under which they lived. Fourthly, that at no rate does it affect, or was ever meant to affect, the acceptance or salvation of individuals in a future life.

First, I say, that the denunciation and sentence relate to the sin of idolatry in particular, if not to that alone. The prohibition of the commandment is pointed against that particular offence, and no other. The first and second commandment may be considered as one, inasmuch as they relate to one subject, or nearly so. For many ages, and by many churches, they were put together, and considered as one commandment. The subject to which they both relate is false worship, or the worship of false gods. This is the single subject to which the prohibition of both commandments relates; the single class of sins which is guarded against. Although, therefore, the expression be, "the sins of the fathers," without specifying in that clause what sins, yet in fair construction, and indeed in common construction, we may well suppose it to be that kind and class of sins, for the restraint of which the command was given, and against which its force was directed. The punishment threatened by any law must naturally be applied to the offence particularly forbidden by that law, and not to offences in general.

One reason why you may not probably perceive the full weight of what I am saying is, that we do not at this day understand, or think much concerning, the sin of idolatry, or the necessity or importance of God's delivering a specific, a solemn, a terrifying sentence against it. The sin itself hath in a manner ceased from among us: other sins, God knows, have come in its place; but this, in a great measure, is withdrawn from our observation: whereas in the age of the world,

and among those people, when and to whom the ten commandments were promulged, false worship, or the worship of false gods, was the sin which lay at the root and foundation of every other. The worship of the one true God, in opposition to the vain, and false, and wicked religions, which had then obtained amongst mankind, was the grand point to be inculcated. It was the contest then carried on; and the then world, as well as future ages, were deeply interested in it. History testifies, experience testifies, that there cannot be true morality, or true virtue, where there is false religion, false worship, false gods: for which reason you find, that this great article (for such it then was) was not only made the subject of a command, but placed at the head of all the rest. Nay more; from the whole strain and tenour of the Old Testament, there is good reason to believe, that the maintaining in the world the knowledge and worship of the one true God, holy, just, and good, in contradiction to the idolatrous worship which prevailed, was the great and principal scheme and end of the Jewish polity and most singular constitution. As the Jewish nation, therefore, was to be the depository of, and the means of preserving in the world, the knowledge and worship of the one true God, when it was lost and darkened in other countries, it became of the last importance to the execution of this purpose that this nation should be warned and deterred, by every moral means, from sliding themselves into those practices, those errors, and that crime, against which it was the very design of their institution that they should strive and contend.

The form of expression used in the second commandment, and in this very part of it, much favours

the interpretation for which I argue, namely, that the sentence or threatening was aimed against the sin of idolatry alone. The words are, "For I the Lord thy God am a *jealous* God, and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children." These two things, of being jealous, and of visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, are spoken of God in conjunction; and in such a manner as to show that they refer to one subject. Now jealousy implies a rival. God's being jealous means, that he would not allow any other god to share with himself in the worship of his creatures: that is what is imported in the word jealous; and, therefore, that is the subject to which the threat of visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children is applied. According to this interpretation, the following expressions of the commandment, "them that hate me," and "them that love me," signify them that forsake and desert my worship and religion for the worship and religion of other gods, and them who adhere firmly and faithfully to my worship, in opposition to every other worship.

My second proposition is, that the threat relates to temporal, or, more properly speaking, to family prosperity and adversity. In the history of the Jews, most particularly of their kings, of whom, as was to be expected, we read and know the most, we meet with repeated instances of this same threat being both pronounced and executed against their family prosperity; and for this very same cause, their desertion of the true God, and going over, after the example of the nations around them, to the worship of false gods. Amongst various other instances, one is very memorable and very direct to our present argument; and that is the instance of Ahab, who, of all the idolatrous kings of Israel, was

the worst. The punishment threatened and denounced against his crime was this: "Behold I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha, the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and made Israel to sin." The provocation, you will observe, was the introduction of false gods into his kingdom; and the prophet here not only threatens Ahab with the ruin and destruction of his family, as the punishment of his sin, but points out to him two instances of great families having been destroyed for the very same reason. You afterwards read the full accomplishment of this sentence by the hand of Jehu. Now I consider these instances as, in fact, the execution of the second commandment, and as showing what sense that commandment bore. But if it were so; if the force of the threat was, that in the distribution and assignment of temporal prosperity and adversity, upon a man's family and to a man's race, respect would be had to his fidelity to God, or his rebellion against him in this article of false and idolatrous worship; then is the punishment, as to the nature and justice of it, agreeable to what we see in the constant and ordinary course of God's providence. The wealth and grandeur of families are commonly owing, not to the present generation, but to the industry, wisdom, or good conduct of a former ancestor. The poverty and depression of a family are not imputable to the present representatives of the family, but to the fault, the extravagance, or mismanagement of those who went before them; of which, nevertheless, they feel the effects. All this we see every day; and we see it without surprise or com-

plaint. What, therefore, accords with the state of things under the ordinary dispensations of Providence as to temporal prosperity and adversity, was, by a special providence, and by a particular sentence, ordained to be the mode, and probably a most efficacious mode, of restraining and correcting an offence, from which it was of the utmost importance to deter the Jewish nation.

My third proposition is, that this commandment related particularly to the Jewish economy. In the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy, you find Moses, with prodigious solemnity, pronouncing the blessings and cursings which awaited the children of Israel under the dispensation to which they were called; and you will observe, that these blessings consisted altogether of worldly benefits, and these curses of worldly punishments. Moses in effect declared, that, with respect to this peculiar people, when they came into their own land, there should be amongst them such a signal and extraordinary and visible interposition of Providence, as to shower down blessings, and happiness, and prosperity upon those who adhered faithfully to the God of their fathers, and to punish, with exemplary misfortunes, those who disobeyed and deserted him. Such, Moses told them, would be the order of God's government over them. This dispensation dealt in temporal rewards and punishments. And the second commandment, which made the temporal prosperity and adversity of families depend, in many instances, upon the religious behaviour of the ancestor of such families, was a branch and consistent part of that dispensation.

But, lastly and principally, my fourth proposition is, that at no rate does it affect, or was ever meant to

affect, the acceptance or salvation of individuals in a future life. My proof of this proposition I draw from the 18th chapter of Ezekiel. It should seem from this chapter, that some of the Jews, at that time, had put too large an interpretation upon the second commandment; for the prophet puts this question into the mouth of his countrymen; he supposes them to be thus, as it were, expostulating with God: "Ye say, Why? Doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father?" that is the question he makes them ask. Now take notice of the answer: the answer which the prophet delivers in the name of God, is this: "When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, *it* shall die. The son shall *not* bear the iniquity of the father; neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon *him*:" verses 19, 20.

In the preceding part of the chapter, the prophet has dilated a good deal, and very expressly indeed, upon the same subject; all to confirm the great truth which he lays down. "Behold all souls are mine, as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine; the soul that sinneth, *it* shall die." Now apply this to the second commandment; and the only way of reconciling them together is by supposing that the second commandment related solely to temporal or rather family adversity and prosperity, and Ezekiel's chapter to the rewards and punishments of a future state. When to this is added what hath been observed, that the threat in the second commandment belongs to

the crime forbidden in that commandment, namely the going over to false gods, and deserting the one true God; and that it also formed a part or branch of the Mosaic system, which dealt throughout in temporal rewards and punishments, at that time dispensed by a particular providence—when these considerations are laid together, much of the difficulty, and much of the objection, which our own minds may have raised against this commandment, will, I hope, be removed.

XXII.

THE PARABLE OF THE SAMARITAN.

LUKE x. 36, 37.

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

THE parable of the good Samaritan was calculated to ascertain who are the proper objects of our love and kindness: for in the conversation which precedes, it seems to have been agreed between our Lord and the person with whom he conversed (who is called by Saint Luke a lawyer, but which name amongst the Jews rather signified a divine), that the great rules of the law were, to "love the Lord thy God, and thy neighbour as thyself." But then a doubt is suddenly started, "who was that neighbour?" who was to be accounted a neighbour within the sense and construction of the precept? To this doubt our Saviour applies this excellent parable. And the whole frame and texture of the parable is contrived to set forth this lesson,—that the persons best entitled to our help and kindness are those who stand in the most urgent need of it; that we are to help those who are most helpless; that our healing, friendly hand is to be held out to all who are cast in our way in circumstances of misery and distress, let their relation to us in other respects be ever so remote, or even ever so adverse; and be the case which

hath brought them under our observation, and within the reach of our assistance, what it will. This is the lesson to be gathered from this beautiful and affecting piece of Scripture; and almost every circumstance introduced into it has a reference and application to that moral. It forms the very point of the narrative. The wounded traveller was a stranger to the man who relieved him. He was more; he was a national enemy. And the very force of the parable turns upon this circumstance. Do you think it was without design that our blessed Saviour made choice of a Samaritan and a Jew as the persons of his story? It was far otherwise: it was with a settled intention of inculcating this benevolent truth—that no difference, no opposition of political, national, or even religious sentiments, ought to check the offices of humanity, where situations of calamity and misfortune called for them; and no two characters in the world could more perfectly answer our Lord's purpose than those of a Samaritan and a Jew; for every one who knows any thing of the history of those times and those countries, or even who has read the New Testament with care, knows this: that the most bitter and rancorous hostility subsisted between these two descriptions of men; and that it was an hostility founded, not only in a difference of nation, but also in a difference of religion. What is, perhaps, still more apt to inflame dislike and enmity, is a difference of doctrines and opinions upon the same religion. On the part of the Samaritans, you meet with an instance of enmity and dislike, in refusing at one of their villages the common rights of hospitality to our Lord and his followers, because he was going up, it seems, to join in the public worship of the festival to be celebrated at Jerusalem, whereas they thought "Mount Gerizim

was the place where men ought to worship." Another instance of the complete alienation and studied distance at which the Jews and Samaritans kept each other is seen in our Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well; for the woman could not forbear expressing her surprise that our Lord, whom she perceived to be a Jew, asked even for a cup of water at her hand: "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, who am a woman of Samaria?" The same thing that had surprised the woman surprised also the disciples: for when they came up to the place, they marvelled, you read, that he talked with the woman; and the cause of surprise in both cases is explained by the Evangelist, who tells us "that the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." In the foul and most undeserved abuse, which some of the Pharisees bestowed upon our Saviour, one of the harshest and bitterest things they could say was, "Thou art a Samaritan." This shows the temper of the men and of the times. Such was a Jew, and such was a Samaritan; yet, in the beautiful parable before us, when a Samaritan found a Jew stripped, wounded, and left half naked, he thought no more of their public hostility, their national quarrel, their religious controversies; still less did he reflect that the Jews and Samaritans had no dealings with each other; that a Jew was not to speak to a Samaritan, nor a Samaritan to a Jew. None of these reflections were entertained by him. He yielded at once to the impulse of his compassion, and to the extremity of the case. Had the Samaritan gone about to seek excuses for passing by the poor traveller, specious excuses were not wanting. The traveller's character was quite unknown to him. He was ignorant what sort of person he was, or how far deserving of his

bounty. He had many at home whom he did know, Samaritans like himself, of the same country and the same faith; and many, no doubt, suffering under every species of distress. The person before him was one of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who were all the old and bitter enemies of his country. He had no reason to think that if a Jew had found him in such a situation, he would have thought it his duty to afford him any succour at all: and no reflection is more common and natural than to do to others, not what we would that others should do to us, but what we believe that others would do to us, if our situations were theirs. The accident also, which had thrown the traveller in his way, was an accident in which he had no concern. He had not robbed or beaten him. It was not owing to him, or to any fault of his, that the road was infested with thieves, and that the mischief had happened. These excuses were at hand; but the Samaritan sought none. It cannot be doubted, in truth it never was doubted, but that our Saviour, in describing the conduct and character of the Samaritan, pointed out a conduct which he approved, and a character which he loved. This is evident, not only from the occasion and general instruction of the parable, but from the words with which our Lord concludes it; "Go, and do thou likewise." The story was so framed, that it extorted a commendation from the Jewish lawyer, though the commendation was bestowed upon a person whom he hated,—upon the enemy of his name and religion,—a Samaritan. And the reply our Saviour made was surely the right and true one—Imitate thou the conduct which thou canst not help approving; "Go, and do thou likewise." It is most evident, therefore, that when, under similar circumstances, we act as the

Samaritan acted, we act according to our Saviour's command.

Now besides the general instruction which there may be gathered from the parable, besides the general impression which it can hardly fail of making upon minds capable of receiving any moral or religious impression at all; besides, I say, its main purpose and general use, there are particular circumstances in it, calculated to excite salutary reflections.

First of all, it was by no means a good disposition in the lawyer, which put him upon asking the question, "Who is my neighbour?" It was seeking a needless difficulty in a plain duty, which always, I take it, springs from a backwardness and lukewarmth, to say the least, towards the duty itself. When men are hearty and in earnest in any duty, they are not apt to multiply questions about it. The lawyer would not love his neighbour as himself till he knew precisely who was to be reckoned his neighbour. Now had his charity been strong, been real, he could have felt no want of any such information: his own heart would have informed him. As occasions arose, as misery and distress came in his way, as the powerful help and succour was possessed by him, he would have been ready to stretch out his hand, to have given way to his compassion, without nicely deliberating whether the object before him wanting his aid, was, or was not, the neighbour whom he was commanded to love.

Secondly; whatever difficulties and distinctions we are perplexed with in our own cases, we can generally determine, both readily and rightly, in the cases that apply to others. When this beautiful narrative was related to the lawyer, and the question upon it pointed home to his conscience, "Which now of these three,

thinkest thou, was neighbour to him that fell among the thieves?" the lawyer had no doubt at all about the answer—"He that showed mercy on him." When another man was concerned, the case was clear. When the precept of loving his neighbour was to be obeyed by himself, and at his own expense, he was then at a loss to know who his neighbour was; to ascertain, that is, the limits, the extent, the measure, the objects of the obligation.

Thirdly, and lastly, we have here, as upon many other occasions, great reason to admire the wisdom with which our blessed Lord spake; the manner and the excellency of his teaching. It is extremely material to observe, that this parable was not merely made by our Lord, or prepared beforehand in the manner of a set discourse, but, from the nature of the case, was conceived at the moment. The occasion was sudden and unexpected: a certain lawyer stood up, and started the question. It was, therefore, our Lord's divine promptness and presence of mind that enabled him, without study, without notice, to deliver a wiser, and more exquisite, and more complete solution of the question, than any study or learning could have produced. This was agreeable to his constant method: he gave to every incident, every discourse, to what happened before his eyes, to what passed in his conversation, a turn so as to draw from it a lesson of perpetual use. Not merely the lawyer was to go away answered, but his disciples instructed—his disciples in all ages of the world. As much, therefore, are we who read this beautiful passage in his Scriptures as they who heard the word from his lips obliged to attend to it in our minds and thoughts, and to observe it in our lives and practice.

XXIII.

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.

MATTHEW XXV. 19.

After a long time, the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

You cannot but know that these words are the conclusion of the parable of the talents; in which parable God's final dealings with mankind are set forth under the similitude of a master, who, setting out upon a distant journey, delivered talents, to some more, and to some fewer, to his several servants, and, upon his return, required from each a separate account of his management; that upon those who had managed what was committed to them with diligence and success he bestowed high, yet proportionable rewards; that one who, though he had not spent or wasted, yet had hidden and totally neglected his talent, and had made no use of it whatever, he not only dismissed without reward, but sentenced him for his neglect to a grievous punishment. Now every thing in the New Testament which discloses the rules and principles according to which God will be pleased to judge us at the last is of extreme importance, because they are what we must stand or fall by, and because they are what we ought to regulate our whole behaviour by, whilst we have the matter in our power. Therefore this parable, as well as those

others concerning the delivery of the talents (for it is given by the Evangelists, and was repeated by our Saviour in two or three different forms), is amongst the passages of Scripture deserving our most serious attention. The points to be well considered are—what is meant by talents; and what is meant by improving, and by neglecting, and by abusing them: for these points being understood, the application of the parable to our respective cases and conditions will be sufficiently plain.

By *talents*, then, are meant any powers or faculties by which we can do good. Every such power or faculty which we find ourselves possessed of is a talent delivered to us by God; and therefore a talent, for the use, the abuse, the neglect of which, as the parable expresses it, our Lord will reckon with us.

One principal thing, and the most difficult thing to be comprehended on the subject, is, that every man, the most common and ordinary person, hath his talent, for the exercise of which he will have to account. I say this is less easy of comprehension, because, whenever we talk of talents, we are in the habit of considering only great talents, or extraordiuary endowments and advantages. We are very ready to allow, and we think that is what the parable means, that those who have superior gifts—those who are blessed with quick abilities, or with favours of fortune above the common lot of mankind—ought to employ these rightly; and that if they do not so, they are highly and justly censurable: but we do not see how this relates to us, who make no pretensions to uncommon endowments of any kind; who are not in stations to possess much power of doing either good or evil. This way of thinking makes nine out of ten regard the parable of the talents as what

does not at all concern them. I will endeavour therefore, as I proceed, to show you, that when the proper and true notion of moral talents is entertained, they are such things as, in a great degree, are given to every one, and what therefore every one will in the same degree be responsible for.

I have said, and I repeat it, that every power and faculty by which, according as we use it, we may do good, and by which, according as we misuse it, we may do harm, is a talent within the sense and rule of the parable. This definition extends the parable to all, notwithstanding there may be, and there is, much diversity, both in kind and degree, of the powers and faculties of different men; yet I believe that there are some of every station in whom their talents do not subsist in a sufficient degree to make the possessors responsible.

To see this satisfactorily, as well indeed as the full drift and extent of the parable, we may reflect, that the gifts which we are to account for, and which, according as we employ them, may be instruments of good or of evil, are either the faculties of the body, the faculties of the mind, or the advantages of situation.

With respect to the body, it is a great fault that few set such value as they ought upon the blessings of health, strength, soundness, and activity: those who possess them are, for the most part, those who never knew the want of them; or else they would be sensible how graciously they were dealt with by their Maker, when he formed them with a vigorous constitution of body. A healthy constitution is a talent, and a talent from God. Now this talent is used as it ought to be when we employ it, and get our own living, in that

station of life into which it hath pleased God to call us; when we labour honestly and faithfully, according to our portion of strength and activity, for the maintenance of our families. This is the natural and intended use of the talent; therefore it may and ought to be an encouraging reflection to the industrious husbandman at his plough, the industrious weaver at his loom, the artificer at his work, the tradesman in his shop, that he is then and there using the precious gift of bodily health and strength in the way in which his Maker intended they should be used, and that when his Master comes to reckon for the gift he can render his account. Health, strength, and activity are talents: lawful industry is the use of these talents. There will be occasions for using them still more meritoriously, when we can put forth our exertion to help a neighbour, to do a good or a kind turn by means of our bodily activity, without desiring or hoping to be paid for it. I do allow that such exertions can only be occasional; but the readiness and the disposition to lend our assistance when the occasions do arise is both a duty and a virtue. To save, for instance, a man from a shipwreck can happen but seldom—but that disposition which would make a man exert or endanger himself when it did happen may be constant—the disposition resides in a good man constantly, though the occasions which call it forth arise only incidentally. The talent is neglected, when men suffer their bodily strength and activity to rust in sloth and idleness, and thereby become a useless burden to society; when men have not taught themselves any useful art, or do not exercise what they profess, with such regularity as to be faithful to the expectations of those who employ them, and so manage

to throw themselves out of employment, and then make that a pretence for leading an idle life. Such men find poverty, unpitied poverty, the common consequence of their conduct; or if they be preserved from that, they find the uncomfortableness of an insignificant existence: but what I wish them to find is, that they are laying up a precious talent in a napkin; that their Lord will come and reckon with them; that they will have no sufficient account to render of their talent—none of its improvement, none of its application. But this talent of bodily health and strength may be worse than neglected—it may be abused; and this is the case when it is employed to carry men into lewd, drunken, or vicious courses.

To see a young man, blessed by his Maker with the gifts of health, strength, and activity—blessings which no money can purchase—blessings, which, if they could be purchased, thousands would lay down their fortunes as the price; to see him using the strength and goodness of his constitution, and at a time of life when both are in perfection, only in pursuit of debauchery and intemperance, and making the firmness of his health only a reason for plunging deeper and continuing longer in these courses—is to witness a most wicked abuse of the Creator's kindness. It is the height and extremity of ingratitude. It is not simply neglecting a precious talent, but it is wilfully consuming and destroying it. Besides every other aggravation that attends this course of life, it is chargeable with the guilt of throwing away the bounty of Providence. What has not such an one to fear, when his Lord shall demand an account of his gifts?

But, secondly, we have other faculties than those of the body—we have endowments of mind to account for,

And by endowments of mind I do not mean great parts, great abilities; because, if the parable related to these alone, it would concern very few: though it be true, no doubt, that such parts and such abilities, when they do occur, cast upon the owner of them corresponding obligation to exert and exercise them properly. They are given, not to outshine others with, but to do good to others. I here rather intend that which, thanks be to God, is conferred upon most of us—a right and sound mind; and I desire it may never be forgotten that this is a gift, properly so called; and moreover, that it is not less a gift because it is bestowed upon others as well as upon us; and being likewise a gift, by the use of which we can do good, it is a talent in the sense of the parable. The capacity of learning is a talent: they therefore who, with sufficient capacity, learn nothing—no useful art, occupation, or knowledge, from being either too idle to take the necessary pains, or too dissipated to give the necessary attention, or submit to the necessary confinement—grievously neglect their talent. They who, being masters of some useful art, do not exercise it to the benefit of mankind, also grievously neglect their talent. They who feel in themselves a particular turn to some one art or science, a peculiar facility in acquiring it, and a prospect of attaining to eminence and excellence, do very well to cultivate their talent in that way in which they can hope to be most serviceable; not, however, imagining that their parts place them above their regular calling, at least, till they have provided themselves with something better. But faculties of mind are abused when our whole ingenuity is turned to contrive and execute mischief, or compass unlawful ends, with more subtlety and success than the generality of men could do; and it is

lamentable to see men of good parts, not only make this bad use of their parts, but boast of so doing, and value themselves upon the extraordinary skill and address which they have shown in carrying some point they never ought to have attempted.

Another talent committed to men, that is, another quality by which they may do either much good or much harm, is the power and influence that result from station. I very well know, you will say, that this talent is not entrusted to us who occupy honest, but certainly very private stations in life: what power have we to use? what influence can we exert? If this be a talent, it is one for which we cannot have to account. Now this is the very point I wish you to see—that private as the situations of most of us undoubtedly are, there is, nevertheless, a species and degree of influence belonging to all of them which we may either apply or misapply, and for which we are equally accountable with those who possess higher stations. For instance: no man has a family of children and servants, but in that very relation of a parent and master of a family he has a great deal of power and influence. The subjects of his power may not be numerous, but the power itself is very great. Here therefore is influence, for the due use of which we shall have to account as much as a prince will have to account for the authority of his station. The parent, therefore, who uses his authority over his children for the purpose of pouring into their minds principles of godliness and religion, of training them up in the habits of piety and obedience to their great Creator, and of qualifying them for being useful to man, discharges his trust, and employs his talent. A parent who is careless about his children altogether, or who, though he takes some care of their education, as

far as respects means of succeeding in the world, yet takes none of their morals, and dispositions, and religion, neglects his trust, and suffers a great opportunity of doing good to pass by him unimproved. Again: a parent who by his countenance and example and conversation leads his children to vice, as much as a good man would lead his children to virtue, not perhaps designedly (for that must be a strange case), but very effectually abuses the ascendancy which God and nature have given him over the minds and persons of his offspring; which ascendancy is full as great in a poor man's family as in a rich man's. The same thing appertains in a considerable, though not in the same degree, to those who have servants within their families, and also, though in a degree less strict, to those who have workmen in their employment. You see, therefore, that the most private station is not without its measure of influence; which influence is a thing committed to us, and for the due use and employment of which we shall be called to account; for the neglect alone, we shall be punished; for the abuse, most severely.

The true way of treating the subject is, not to go about to excuse ourselves by the humility or poverty of our station, the common and ordinary nature of our faculties and occupations, and so leave the instruction contained in the parable of the talents to the concern of those who feel themselves in possession of great abilities, great wealth, and great stations to do good in, as if these alone were intended to be admonished by it: but the way is, first, to regard every means and every opportunity of doing good to any as a talent in the meaning of the parable; and then to inquire what means, what opportunities are given to ourselves, either

in our bodily health and vigour, or in our mental soundness and understanding, or in our place and relation as parents and children, as masters of servants, as members of a neighbourhood; and whereinsoever we find the means and opportunities (and no man who inquires fairly but will find many, and sometimes more than he had believed or thought of) to consider them as what he shall have to account for at last, and the use, or neglect, or abuse of which will form one principal subject of inquiry at the last day, and one principal ground of God's judgement; ever bearing in mind, what the parable very expressly avers—that the neglect simply will be imputed to us as a crime.

the great Judge of all men, who knows well the heart and the secrets of it, and who judges not by appearance but principles, it makes no difference what cloke or colour our passions put on. Religion is that which must save us. How exceedingly pernicious, therefore, must any bad passions of our nature, that turn of temper be, which places all religion upon this wrong foundation; and so, by making it spring from a motive that is not right, makes it offensive and displeasing to God, instead of being an acceptable service to him!

This is the ground on which I choose at present to fix the pernicious nature of spiritual pride; namely, that it makes all religion proceed from wrong motives, though it might at the same time be accused of making men morose, censorious, unforgiving, and disdainful.

But this domineering opinion of our own proficiency in concerns of religion is pernicious in its effects upon others as well as upon the man himself who is influenced by it. It raises in others a disgust and dislike of religion. When they see that religion only makes a man contemptuous and austere, they naturally enough begin to entertain a prejudice against such religion as an insult upon themselves. No man can bear to be despised in his religion any more than in other things; so that when they find any one so proudly and ostentatiously displaying his abundance of piety; when he seems by his carriage and conversation to let them know how much he is their superior in the most important thing in the world; it is not to be wondered at if they take an aversion to religion, which only tends, in this instance (and it is but few that will look beyond it), to engender superciliousness and self-conceit. I don't say that they argue *rightly*, but it is sure enough that many do argue so: it is enough to render those justly

chargeable with doing much mischief in the world who thus create an aversion to religion. We are to *win* our brethren, and bring them over to the service of holiness; and there is sufficient impiety in the world to make it altogether unnecessary to offend by a fastidious pride of godliness.

Such, then, is the nature and effect of religious pride; and I think I may say that no other sort of pride is so dangerous; and such were the effects which were too obvious to escape the censure of our Saviour—particularly as he had constantly before him examples of it in the Pharisees. The little parable which forms the text is calculated exactly to reprove this vice, and is most admirably contrived for that purpose, as well as to show the general temper and character of Christ's religion, which upon this, as upon all other occasions, abounds in quietness, humility, and peace.

What little is necessary to be explained in this parable I will now proceed to observe, though my discourse will answer a good purpose if it be the means only of making you mark and call to mind the parable itself, whenever any sentiment of self-sufficiency in religion rises in your minds; whenever you are tempted, that is, whenever you are tempted to be religious merely out of competition, or to view your own supposed state with vanity, and look upon that of others with disdain.

A Pharisee and Publican went up into the Temple to pray. The Pharisees were a religious sect who pretended to extraordinary strictness, and were of high repute amongst their countrymen for their supposed sanctity. A Publican was a tax-gatherer, employed by the Romans, who had the Jews in subjection, to collect taxes among them. They were, as you may suppose, extremely odious and ill-thought of, partly because the

Jews, who were weary under their subjection, hated their profession, and partly because the persons themselves deserved it. Now it was not without design that our Saviour in this parable made choice of a Pharisee and Publican; as he thereby intimated that in people and professions of the highest repute you will often meet only pride and hypocrisy—while in others, the meanest, and most despised or disliked, you shall find sincere piety and virtue; that with God, who seeth not as we see, who regardeth not names, or persons, or professions, the service of one shall be accepted, the other rejected. "The Pharisee prayed thus with himself—God, I thank thee, I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican." This might be all true; indeed, we ought to suppose it was true: but was it his business to *remind*, as it were, his God of it, or even to bear it in his own mind whilst he was addressing God? It showed that his reflections were employed, not upon the purity and glory of his Creator, but upon himself. Had his thoughts been at all fixed upon his God; had he considered his own infinite remoteness from him; the adorable and astonishing perfections of the being he was addressing; and his own weakness, infirmity, and vileness—he would rather have trembled under the thoughts of addressing him at all, than have come to him with a proud recital of his imaginary virtues. Nothing, if you reflect upon it, could be more out of season. The Pharisee's prayer was, in truth, no devotion at all; for it was not God, the object of all devotion, that was in his thoughts, but his own good qualities. Though we must suppose, to give the parable its proper force, that the Pharisee was, what he pretended to be, guiltless of extortion and adultery; that he was, comparatively with this Pub-

lican, and generally speaking, virtuous; yet we must suppose also that he had his failings and his faults, of which we are to hear nothing. He seems to have no remembrance, to make no acknowledgement of his sins andfrailties—these had no place in the worship of the Pharisee, if it can be called worship; and this was one reason that made it unacceptable to God.

But another part of the Pharisee's behaviour on this occasion is very strongly to be censured; that part is the *uncharitableness* of it. The Publican stood with him in the Temple, though afar off. This Pharisee could not pass by the opportunity of indulging his vanity, and declaring his superiority; he could not even there refrain from that contempt and hatred with which this order of men was treated. What had this poor Publican done to him? What right had he to insult him? Whatever this Publican was, he was not then, nor at any time, a subject of triumph or contempt to the Pharisee. Most men would have been softened down by such an occasion, and have considered that they, as fellow-creatures and brethren, were kneeling down before their common Parent, imploring the same mercy, in need of the same bounty and protection. The Pharisee, on the contrary, did not only look upon this supposed sinner to cherish his own pride and complacency, but he must even turn intercessor with God against him, and presume to carry his arrogance and invective to the footstool of divine mercy itself. No wonder that God should turn away his ears from prayers which are mingled with malice and presumption.

In our poor Publican we have a model, I take it, of true Christian devotion. He comes with a deep and afflicting sense of his sins, and an earnest concern and contrition for them: he makes no comparisons, he draws

no parallel betwixt himself and others; nor does he fly to those wild and superstitious modes of appeasing an angry God, which grief or dismay is wont to suggest; but with that true and unaffected simplicity which comes pure from the heart, he casts himself on the compassion of his Maker; "he would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner!"

We can never sufficiently admire the meekness and humility, the simplicity and earnestness, of this prayer. I do not mean an affected humility, which is put on for the purpose; but that which is real and undesigned, flowing from a just sense of our own vileness and offences.

The Publican's prayer was agreeable to God; and the more our prayers resemble it in spirit—the more unmixed they come from the heart—the more simple they are in expression—the more we have reason, from this parable, to hope that they will be accepted. "I tell you," says our Saviour, "this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." Our Saviour does not directly say that either was justified, nor was it likely that the Saviour would give countenance to such a doctrine; but so far as depended upon the act of devotion, the Publican was more acceptable to God than the Pharisee.

The application of this parable to ourselves is easy. Do we secretly allow ourselves to say or think we are not so bad as other men are, or even as this or that particular person? Let us remember the parable. Do we profess a strictness in our religion, with a view, not only of pleasing and obeying God, but with a notion that we are surpassing our neighbour, and with a view of triumphing over him? Let us remember the parable.

Does the pleasure and satisfaction we take in performing the duties of our religion arise merely from the thought of obtaining God's approbation, or are we counting upon the applause of the world; feeding and flattering our own consequence? Does our notion of piety lead us to survey others, even bad men, with complacency and compassion, and to behave towards them accordingly? Does it cool or diminish our good-will and benevolence towards our neighbours? Does it make us more curious to find out their faults; more willing to stick to their failings than to seek for virtues; more liberal of our censure; less inclined to forgive; more disposed to hate; more ready to throw others at a distance, in order to indulge our own spleen, and swell out our own importance? then must we remember the parable. Do we bring this conceit of ourselves and contempt of others to church? does it mix with and steal upon our devotions in private? Whenever we find this temper growing upon us, we may be sure that our religion is taking a wrong turn; it does not proceed from a growth of Christianity within us; it is the religion of the Pharisee, and not that which will make us full of gentleness, meek, humble, affectionate, and compassionate; tending to exercise and improve the love of our neighbour, instead of inclining us towards contempt and hatred.

XXV.

SERIOUSNESS OF HEART AS TO RELIGION.

LUKE VIII. 15.

But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.

IT may be true, that a right religious principle produces corresponding external actions, and yet it may not be true, that external actions are what we should always, or entirely, or principally, look to for the purpose of estimating our religious character; or from whence alone we should draw our assurance and evidence of being in the right way.

External actions must depend upon ability, and must wait for opportunity. From a change in the heart, a visible outward change will ensue: from an amendment of disposition, an amended conduct will follow: but it may neither be so soon, nor so evident, nor to such a degree, as we may at first sight expect, inasmuch as it will be regulated by occasions and by ability. I do not mean to say (for I do not believe it to be so), that there is any person so forlorn and destitute as to have no good in his power: expensive kindnesses may not; but there is much kindness, which is not expensive: a kindness of temper; a readiness to oblige; a willingness to assist; a constant inclination to promote the comfort and satisfaction of all who are

about us, of all with whom we have concern or connexion, of all with whom we associate or converse.

There is also a concern for the virtue of those over whom, or with whom, we can have any sort of influence, which is a natural concomitant of a radical concern for virtue in ourselves.

But above all, it is undoubtedly in every person's power, whether poor or rich, weak or strong, ill or well endowed by nature or education, it is, I say, in every person's power to avoid sin: if he can do little good, to take care that he do no ill.

Although, therefore, there be no person in the world so circumstanced, but who both can, and will, testify this inward principle by his outward behaviour, in one shape or other; yet, on account of the very great difference of those circumstances in which men are placed, and to which their outward exertions are subjected, outward behaviour is not always a just measure of inward principle.

But there is a second case, and that but too common, in which outward behaviour is no measure of religious principle at all; and that is, when it springs from other and different motives and reasons from those which religion presents. A very bad man may be externally good: a man completely irreligious at the heart may, for the sake of character, for the advantage of having a good character, for the sake of decency, for the sake of being trusted and respected, and well spoken of, from a love of praise and commendation, from a view of carrying his schemes and designs in the world, or of raising himself by strength of character, or at least from a fear lest a tainted character should be an obstacle to his advancement—from these, and a thousand such sort of considerations, which might be reckoned up,

and with which, it is evident, that religion hath no concern or connexion whatever, men may be both active, and forward, and liberal, in doing good; and exceedingly cautious of giving offence by doing evil; and this may be either wholly, or in part, the case with ourselves.

In judging, therefore, and examining ourselves, with a view of knowing the real condition of our souls, the real state and the truth of our spiritual situation in respect to God, and in respect to salvation, it is neither enough, nor is it safe, to look only to our external conduct.

I do not speak in any manner of judging of other men: if that were necessary at all, which, with a view to religion, it never is, different rules must be laid down for it. I now only speak of that which is necessary, and most absolutely so, in judging rightly of ourselves. To our hearts, therefore, we must look for the marks and tokens of salvation, for the evidence of being in the right way. "That on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart bring forth fruit with patience."

One of these marks, and that no slight one, is seriousness at the heart. I can have no hope at all of a man who does not find himself serious in religious matters, serious at the heart. If the judgement of Almighty God at the last day; if the difference between being saved and being lost; being accepted in the beloved, and being cast forth into outer darkness; being bid by a tremendous word either to enter into the joy of our Father, or to go into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels, for all who have served him and not God: if these things do not make us serious, then it is most certain, either that we do not believe them, or that we have not yet thought of them at all, or that we

have positively broken off thinking of them, have turned away from the subject, have refused to let it enter, have shut our minds against it; or lastly, that such a levity of mind is our character, as nothing whatever can make any serious impression upon. In any of these cases our condition is deplorable; we cannot look for salvation from Christ's religion under any of them. Do we want seriousness concerning religion, because we do not believe in it? we cannot expect salvation from a religion which we reject. What the root of unbelief in us may be, how far voluntary and avoidable, how far involuntary and unavoidable, God knows, and God only knows; and, therefore, he will in his mercy treat us as he thinketh fit: but we have not the religion to rely upon, to found our hopes upon; we cannot, as I say again, expect salvation from a religion which we reject.

If the second case be ours, namely, that we have not yet thought of these things, and *therefore* it is that we are not serious about them, it is high time with every one, that he do think of them. These great events are not at a distance from us; they approach to every one of us with the end of our lives; they are the same, to all intents and purposes, as if they took place at our deaths. It is ordained for men once to die, and after that, judgement. Wherefore it is folly in any man or woman whatever, in any thing above a child, to say they have not thought of religion: it is worse than folly, it is high presumption. How know they that they will be permitted to think of it at all? It is an answer one sometimes receives, but it is a foolish answer. Religion can do no good, till it sinks into the thoughts. Commune with thyself and be still. Can any health, or strength, or youth, any vivacity of spirits, any crowd

or hurry of business, much less any course of pleasures, be an excuse for not thinking about religion? Is it of importance only to the old and infirm and dying to be saved? is it not of the same importance to the young and strong? can they be saved without religion? or can religion save them without thinking about it?

If, thirdly, such a levity of mind be our character, as nothing can make an impression upon, this levity must be cured, before ever we can draw near unto God. Surely human life wants not materials and occasions for the remedying of this great infirmity. Have we met with no troubles to bring us to ourselves? no disasters in our affairs? no losses in our families? no strokes of misfortune or affliction? no visitations in our health? no warnings in our constitution? If none of these things have befallen us, and it is for that reason that we continue to want seriousness and solidity of character, then it shows how necessary these things are for our real interest and for our real happiness: we are examples how little mankind can do without them, and that a state of unclouded pleasure and prosperity is, of all others, the most unfit for man. It generates the precise evil we complain of, a giddiness and levity of temper upon which religion cannot act. It indisposes a man for weighty and momentous concerns of any kind; but it most fatally disqualifies him for the concerns of religion. That is its worst consequence, though others may be bad. I believe, therefore, first, that there is such a thing as a levity of thought and character, upon which religion has no effect. I believe, secondly, that this is greatly cherished by health and pleasures, and prosperity, and gay society. I believe, thirdly, that, whenever this is the case, these things, which are accounted such blessings, which men

covet and envy, are, in truth, deep and heavy calamities. For, lastly, I believe that this levity must be changed into seriousness, before the mind infected with it can come unto God; and most assuredly true it is, that we cannot come to happiness in the next world, unless we come to God in this.

I repeat again, therefore, that we must look to our hearts for our character: not simply or solely to our actions, which may be and will be of a mixed nature, but to the internal state of our disposition. That is the place in which religion dwells: in that it consists. And I also repeat, that one of these internal marks of a right disposition, of an honest and good heart, as relative to religion, is seriousness. There can be no true religion without it. And farther, a mark and test of a growing religion is a growing seriousness; so that when, instead of seeing these things at a distance, we begin to look *near* upon them; when from faint, they become distinct; when, instead of now and then perceiving a slight sense of these matters, a hasty passage of them, as it were, through the thoughts, they begin to rest and settle there; in a word, when we become *serious* about religion, then, and not till then, may we hope that things are going on right within us; that the soil is prepared; the seed sown. Its future growth and maturity and fruit may not yet be known, but the seed is sown in the heart; and in a serious heart it will not be sown in vain; in a heart not yet become serious, it may.

Religious seriousness is not churlishness, is not severity, is not gloominess, is not melancholy: but it is nevertheless a *disposition* of mind, and, like every disposition, it will show itself one way or other. It will, in the first place, neither invite, nor entertain, nor en-

courage any thing which has a tendency to turn religion into ridicule. It is not in the nature of things, that a serious mind should find delight or amusement in so doing; it is not in the nature of things, that it should not feel an inward pain and reluctance whenever it is done. Therefore, if we are capable of being pleased with hearing religion treated, or talked of, with levity; made, in any manner whatever, an object of sport and jesting; if we are capable of making it so ourselves, or joining with others, as in a diversion, in so doing; nay, if we do not feel ourselves at the heart grieved and offended, whenever it is our lot to be present at such sort of conversation and discourse; then is the inference, as to ourselves, infallible, that we are not yet serious in our religion; and then it will be for us to remember that seriousness is one of those marks by which we may fairly judge of the state of our mind and disposition, as to religion; and that the state of our mind and disposition is the very thing to be consulted, to be known, to be examined and searched into, for the purpose of ascertaining whether we are in a right and safe way, or not. Words and actions are to be judged of, with a reference to the disposition which they indicate. There may be language, there may be expressions, there may be behaviour, of no very great consequence in itself and considered in itself, but of very great consequence indeed, when considered as indicating a disposition and state of mind. If it show, with respect to religion, *that* to be wanting within, which ought to be there, namely, a deep and fixed sense of our personal and individual concern in religion, of its importance above all other important things; then it shows that there is yet a deficiency in our hearts, which, without delay, must be supplied by closer medi-

tation upon the subject than we have hitherto used; and, above all, by earnest and unceasing prayer for such a portion and measure of spiritual influence shed upon our hearts as may cure and remedy that heedlessness and coldness, and deadness and unconcern, which are fatal, and under which, we have so much reason to know, that we as yet unhappily labour.

XXVI.

ANALOGY BETWEEN OUR NATURAL AND RELIGIOUS PROGRESS.

1 Cor. xiii. 11, 12.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

Saint Paul in these words means to describe the imperfect state of our knowledge now, with respect to any of these mysterious parts of both natural and revealed religion, especially with respect to what shall take place after this life, compared with that clear and complete knowledge of these subjects which we shall be endowed with then; and the similitude he makes use of—that of the thoughts and understanding of a child, compared with the thoughts and understanding of the same person when become a man—always appeared to me to convey the justest conception of this matter, and the most likely to satisfy us in the darkness, and confusion, and uncertainty under which we labour, of any that could have been devised for the purpose. Saint Paul's words might be briefly explained thus: Let a grown person look back upon the notions and views of things which he had when a child—let

him remark how much these notions are altered, and improved, and corrected since—how vain, and wild, and simple, and short of the truth they then were;—and how sensible soever such a person must be of the feebleness of his early understanding, of the errors and extravagance of his childish conceits, equally sensible shall we, in another life, become of the imperfection, and weakness, and fallaciousness of our present judgement and our present apprehension of many subjects. This is what Saint Paul says of himself; and whatever he confessed of his own understanding in these matters, surely we need not be loth to acknowledge of ours. But to do Saint Paul's observation justice, it will be fitting to point out distinctly, and more at length, every particular in which his comparison holds; for I think the more we turn it in our minds, the more truth, impressiveness, and good sense we shall discover in it.

First, then, it must strike every one who will please to review the ideas and imaginations of his youth, of what was then his notion of many things which he now looks at, and has long looked at, as so many vain and foolish baubles—how eager he was in the pursuit of them, how impatient of being disappointed. He is at a loss now to conceive where or in what the value or pleasure of them could consist, so much to engage his affections, to agitate his passions, to give him such anxiety in the pursuit, and pain in the loss. Now something very like this will probably take place in the judgement we shall hereafter form of many of the articles which at present compose the objects of our care and solicitude. When we come in the new state of our existence to look back upon riches and honours, and fortune, and pre-eminence, and prosperity—how like the

what we shall all be made sensible of when we arrive at our future country—that we have been and are equally perverse, headstrong, and impatient in the conduct of our greatest concerns—that the time which we thought too long to wait for reward was but a moment —that the misery we have brought upon ourselves did, in truth, come close behind our crimes, though it appeared removed to a great distance; for such will be the judgement we shall form of this little portion of our existence, which we shall hereafter look back upon, compared with the immortality that lies before us.

Thirdly, we can seldom review what passed in our minds when we were children, without being surprised with the odd and extravagant notions which we took up and entertained—how wildly we accounted for some things, and what strange forms we assigned to many other things—what improbable resemblances we supposed, what unlikely effects we expected, what consequences we feared. I can easily believe that many of the opinions and notions we now erroneously entertain, especially concerning the place, condition, nature, occupation, and happiness of departed saints, may hereafter appear to us as wild, as odd, as unlikely and ill founded, as our childish fancies appear to us now. Like the child, we take our ideas from what we see, and transfer them to what we do not see: like him, we look upon, and judge of things above our understanding, by comparing them with things which we do understand; and they bear afterwards as little resemblance, as little foundation for comparison, as the most chimerical and fantastic visions of a childish imagination. And this I judge to be what Saint Paul had particularly in his thoughts when he wrote the words of the text. "Now

we know in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away," even as "when I was a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things." Our apprehensions of futurity may, it is true, be in many respects childish; but still they may be innocent, so long as we are not over anxious nor over positive to insist upon others receiving them, and too much inclined to make difficulties, or start at those which we meet with, from an opinion that we are able to guess and find out the whole of such subjects.

Fourthly, a child meets with perpetual difficulties, which appear to its then comprehension unconquerable, which yet, when it becomes a man, clear up, and vanish of themselves. It cannot be made to understand the reason or the meaning of half the things which its parents and its masters make it do or suffer. Why so much restraint and confinement? wherefore these grievous tasks, that difficult lesson, these strict rules? It is made to feel pain and uneasiness, of which it sees neither end nor use. "How is this to be reconciled," a child will naturally ask, "with that kindness, and love, and goodness which it is told to expect from its parents?" Now as the child advances in reason and observation, all these difficulties solve themselves. He remembers with gratitude what he suffered with complaint: he sees care and love, when at the time he could only perceive arbitrary severity and churlish cruelty: he discovers the end aimed at, the importance of that end, how the means made use of conduced to it, how requisite they were, how beneficial they have turned out. Now all this bears, in my mind, a consi-

derable analogy to the difficulties we labour under, as to the dispensations of divine Providence. Look to the whole of our existence, and the wisest and oldest of us are but yet in our infancy—as much strangers to the exigencies and condition of our future state as a child is to that of a man. Can it be wondered at that we should meet with embarrassments, and inconsistency, and seeming disorder and confusion, and yet it may in truth be all a regular plan, answering a good end by wise means? We know in part—a certain portion of our nature, existence, and destiny we do see; but it is a portion bounded by narrow limits—a term out of eternity. Now all such partial knowledge must be encumbered with many difficulties: it is like viewing the map of a district or small tract of territory by itself, and separated from the adjacent country: we see rivers marked out without any source to flow from, and running where there is nothing to receive them. In like manner, we observe events in the world, of which we trace not either cause or origin, and tending to no design or purpose that we can discover. If the child have patience to wait, many of these its difficulties will in due time be explained. And this is our case. It was not necessary to the child's happiness and well-being, that it should have from the first the understanding of a man; nor is it to ours, that we should possess the faculties of angels, or those which are in reversion for us in a higher and more advanced state of existence. The child is in the hands of its parent, and so are we. The wisdom of the parent will supply the ignorance of the child, his prudence guide its folly, his strength protect its weakness, his care conduct it to happiness. How much does this representation agree with what

we believe and hope of our Almighty and Universal Father! We are the works of the creation, and produced by his great kindness; and while we study to please and obey him, the objects of his love—safe under his wings, secure under his protection, assisted by his succours, directed by his holy influence, enlightened by his word and spirit, relying upon his love, and finally conducted by his care from perfection to perfection, from our present degree of happiness to a better world—we attain the fulness of joy in the presence of God, and the pleasures at his right hand for evermore.

XXVII.

THE ADVANTAGES OF OLD AGE.

JOB XXXII. 7.

I said, days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.

EVERY age of life has its advantages and disadvantages, not only in respect of strength, activity, and pleasure on one side; of judgement, experience, and wisdom on the other; and as these qualities relate to the success or the happiness of our present existence; but there is in the different periods of life a system also of advantages and disadvantages respecting religion itself.

The work of salvation is before us at all ages. Youth can bring to the task sensibility, usefulness, innocency, activity—a mind yet unoccupied, and yet unenslaved by vicious habits—a strength capable of doing much good—a conscience quick and sensible—a heart warm, and susceptible of benevolent affections—a vigour of principle, and a glow of devotion, which no other season of life can pretend to. God grant that the young may use and exert these faculties and these advantages as they ought to do! But what are the advantages, or are there any, which the coldness and weakness of age can set against these? What is there applicable to religious improvement which the natural condition of advanced years brings with it? Those it is my purpose to set forth, as well for consolation as instruction; because

if any one can feel that he is capable of making himself more and more ready for the great change which is approaching, it is, and ought to be, a support and comfort to him, under either the consciousness of decay, or the weight of infirmities; and also, if there be properties, of which advanced life, and advanced life alone is capable, and which tend to make us holier and happier, God forbid that we should not know them, and exercise them, and use them!

Now first, I do say, that older men are naturally more sensible of the mercies of God. I do not say that they have greater reason to be sensible of the mercies of God, but that they are more sensible of them. Young people regard their health and strength, their vigour, spirits, and enjoyments, as natural to their time of life, and what other young people possess as well as themselves. They look upon them as things of course. These blessings often fail of exciting any adequate sense of gratitude in their hearts. They do not, strictly speaking, perceive that they are blessings at all. They scarcely know the want—they have felt little of the interruption of them. They do not reflect upon the goodness of their Maker in giving them, because they see them to be general, and almost universal. Yet, how wrong is this forgetfulness! Is the goodness of God less, because he is constantly giving these blessings? Is it less, because he has given them to so many, that it is singular not to receive them? yet you find this very constancy of his bounty, this very extent of his beneficence, becomes the reason why it is not felt and thought of as it ought to be. Was there but here and there a person in the full enjoyment of health, in the perfect possession and exercise of his faculties; that person, it may be supposed, would

be filled with thankfulness to his Creator for his kindness towards him. But is he less to be thanked, because, in truth, he is more kind? because his bounty flows and spreads around to others as well as to us—to the general condition of life at certain periods? It is a sad thing that we are not touched with the goodness of God, at the time when we ought to be so most highly; that is, when we are receiving the strongest proofs and effects of it. It is a sad thing not to know or estimate the gifts and blessings of our state till we experience the loss, and interruption, and decay of them. Yet it is so. Who are the heedless, the careless, the despisers of religion, the contemners of their Creator, but the very persons who are in the fullest enjoyment of his gifts?

Now it is a most blessed, as it is a natural effect of age, to cure *this inattention*, the greatest of all other inattentions. Most things, when men grow older, take a different appearance. When they are to feel pain and sickness, frequent or long interruptions of health, they begin to understand what a blessing health is—they begin to wonder that they accounted so little of it when they had it—that they were so ungrateful to God Almighty for it. Who, that is advanced in life, does not make these reflections? Who can avoid making them? In like manner, when their senses and faculties begin to fail, they then begin to learn their value: when their sight grows dim, they are taught by its decay to know, what, if they *knew*, they probably seldom thought of before—how inestimable a gift the use of their eyes was. They begin to understand the Creator's care and mercy and bounty in our wonderful formation; most particularly in the use we have found, and perhaps unthankfully enjoyed, of this small but

astonishing organ. As their faculty of hearing grows dull, or difficult, or imperfect; and whilst they lament its incurable decline, or strive a little longer to preserve it, they at the same time are made to comprehend how unworthily they judged of this matter, when all the reflection that passed in their mind upon it was, that they heard sounds as others heard them—that if they conversed and were entertained, it was only as others conversed and were entertained. They did not perceive it, or think it to be a blessing coming immediately from God, in the same manner as they now perceive it to be. Fast and good and salutary reflections are forced upon them by infirmities, which had very little place in their minds, when, in fact, they ought to have had the most—in the midst of health and strength.

Amongst other points of instruction which are gained from years, this may be one; that they bring men to see *how much the gifts of nature excel the gifts of fortune*—how much, as our Saviour expresses it, the life is more than meat, and the body than raiment—how much health, for instance, is above riches; strength and activity of our own above the help and attendance of others; nature in all things above art; beauty above dress; the use of our eye-sight more precious, by a thousand degrees, than treasures of gold and silver; of hearing, than all the titles and honours and distinctions in the world. I do not say that in youth men do not *believe* this assertion, but they do not *reflect* upon it. It is a thought which does not readily come into their minds; when, if ever they live to find the declension or departure of these blessings, then they will know, that the things which they receive im-

mediately, as it were, from the hands of our Creator, and which the poor receive equally at least, and perhaps more than equally, with the rich, are, beyond all price and calculation and comparison, superior to what they receive by any thing that proceeds from civil or social intercourse. They are then convinced how poor and contemptible, how misplaced and miscalculated, is not only the indulgence of their bad propensities, but the objects for which they indulge them; when they are taught that riches and honours are what they have been used to envy and covet; the gifts of their Maker are what they have neglected, passed over, and abused—what they have never thought of in relation to the Benefactor who gave them, or with a feeling of everlasting gratitude which is due to him for so great and gracious a blessing.

Again; old age brings us to know the value of the blessings which we have enjoyed; and it brings us also to a very thankful perception of those which yet remain. Is a man advanced in life? The ease of a single day, the rest of a single night, are gifts which may be subjects of gratitude to God. He is sensible of the gift. The gifts of God are not more or greater to one state of life than another; but a great many very important circumstances belonging to their states, which by the young and strong are regarded as no advantages, are felt by the old as very great blessings, and felt with great satisfaction and thankfulness. *Ease* to the young is insipid; and, if continued, wearisome—to the old it is sufficient to constitute enjoyment. It has been said of these two periods of life, that young men are never happy but when they are in the pursuit or enjoyment of pleasure—that old men

are happy when they are at ease. The young are fretful, and restless, and impatient, under the mere absence of pain; the old, on the contrary, draw actual enjoyment from this state. I think this is a true account, and that it was intended so to be. The young were intended for activity; and they were, therefore, to be stimulated and spurred on to exertion. It would not have agreed with the intention of an all-wise Providence to have made them content with ease. The old, on the other hand, were designed for repose; which design is indicated, not only by the gradual declension of their active powers, but by the increasing satisfaction which they find in repose. Herein old age has the advantage over youth. Ease is more readily attainable than pleasure. The time of life and state of constitution which may be made happy by ease may be blessed with a portion of happiness, which its more flourishing periods may never yet have obtained. The truth seems to be, that God has provided for each season of life its own satisfactions. A well-ordered mind not only perceives this in general, but makes the very interruption and decay and loss of former faculties a reason for being more exceedingly thankful for those which are left. If his strength fail, he draws more happiness from the use of that which is left.

Now every thing which is of a nature to turn the thoughts to God in religion, or rather may be, and ought to be, a source of religion; and whatever has a tendency to make us look upon God as the father of all these benefits—see him in his gifts—refer to him all our comforts—understand our close and intimate dependence upon him both in body and soul, for our

bodily ease as well as mental tranquillity—every thing, in a word, which stirs and excites our affection towards him, may produce in us a near application to religion; may carry us to it in the best way. And we may, therefore, say, that advanced years ought to dispose men to their religion on this very account—that they make them more sensible of the gifts and graces and blessings of our Creator than youth usually is: I do not mean to say, than youth ought to be—the contrary is the truth; but than youth usually is.

Again; it is scarcely possible that any man can have lived to sixty or seventy years without having experienced many special blessings: I do not mean that general providence, by which his life has been for so long time preserved and continued to him, but many *special* favours and mercies in the course of it. Recollections of this kind, so long as God is pleased to grant the powers of recollection, ought to employ the minds of those in particular who are advanced in years, and raise their thoughts to God. Either they have been critically perhaps preserved from sin, which, though they did not think so at the time, they now acknowledge to have been the very greatest of all possible mercies; or though they have fallen, or perhaps rushed headlong into sin, they were not ruined by it, as they might have been ruined; they escaped many of the consequences of it, which might have destroyed them. They were spared in order to repent. They were saved and snatched as a brand out of the fire. These are truly spiritual blessings. These are points and marks of Providence which ought to be peculiarly grateful to aged men, and which they should delight to meditate upon, both because they are immediately and in-

timately connected with that salvation in which they now ought to be more peculiarly interested, and leading their contemplation into that eternity they do certainly border upon; and also, because the chief and natural satisfaction of old age is mental rather than bodily. But even here many recollections crowd upon a mind even less sensible to the gratifications of thought and serious meditation. They may have been recovered and rescued in times of great bodily danger. Their lives and limbs have been preserved to them through some great perils, some extraordinary accidents, some severe sickness. They have often been drawn near to the edge and brink of their mortal fate. They have stood upon the precipice of death and confines of eternity; and what makes such preservation a mercy indeed is that which I fear too many of us but too well remember—that if they had been cut off when they were in so much danger, they had been cut off in their sins. Is not then our preservation from such dangers, both ghostly and bodily—both of soul and body—a mercy to be acknowledged with the deepest sense of thankfulness and obligation? Still more shall we acknowledge it, if we have used the mercy and forbearance of our Maker as we ought to do; that is, if we have grown better since: if danger has alarmed and roused us; if our escape has taught us fear and caution —fear of God, and caution in offending him: if these beginnings have gone on, and have had the effect of generating seriousness of temper, holiness and purity of heart, more spirituality than was formerly felt, stronger faith and livelier hopes, a gradual rising above the follies of the world; what may we not attribute to this multitude of years—to this language, which nature and

age so forcibly speak? A mature age, well instructed by experience, well versed in the changes and chances of this mortal life, ought to be expected to have where at last to fix its views—whither to point and direct all its endeavours—from whence to look for any steadfast ground of consolation, any firm security, any rational object of pursuit and confidence.

XXVIII.

OF THE STATE AFTER DEATH.

1 JOHN III. 2.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

ONE of the most natural solicitudes of the human mind is to know what will become of us after death, what is already become of those friends who are gone. I do not so much mean the great question, whether we and they shall be happy or miserable, as I mean the question, what is the nature and condition of that state which we are so soon to try. This solicitude, which is both natural and strong, is sometimes, however, carried too far; and this is the case when it renders us uneasy, or dissatisfied, or impatient under the obscurity in which the subject is placed; and placed, not only in regard to us, or in regard to common men, but in regard even to the apostles themselves of our Lord, who were taught from his mouth, as well as immediately instructed by his Spirit. Saint John, the author of the text which I have read to you, was one of these; not only an apostle, but of all the apostles, perhaps, the most closely connected with his Master, and admitted to the most intimate familiarity with him. What it was allowed, therefore, for man to know, Saint John

knew. Yet this very Saint John acknowledges "that it doth not yet appear what we shall be;" the exact nature, and condition, and circumstances of our future state are yet hidden from us.

I think it credible that this may, in a very great degree, arise from the nature of the human understanding itself. Our Saviour said to Nicodemus, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" It is evident from the strain of this extraordinary conversation, that the disbelief on the part of Nicodemus, to which our Saviour refers, was that which arose from the difficulty of comprehending the subject. Therefore our Saviour's words to him may be construed thus: If what I have just now said concerning the new birth, concerning being born again, concerning being born of the Spirit, concerning the agency of the Spirit, which are all "earthly things," that is, are all things that pass in the hearts of Christians in this their present life, and upon this earth; if this information prove so difficult, that you cannot bring yourself to believe it, by reason of the difficulty of apprehending it; "how shall ye believe," how would ye be able to conquer the much greater difficulties which would attend my discourse, "if I told you of heavenly things?" that is to say, if I speak to you of those things which are passing, or which will pass, in heaven, in a totally different state and stage of existence, amongst natures and beings unlike yours? The truth seems to be, that the human understanding, constituted as it is, though fitted for the purposes for which we want it, that is, though capable of receiving the instruction and knowledge, which are necessary for our conduct and the discharge of our duty, has a native original incapacity

for the reception of any distinct knowledge of our future condition. The reason is, that all our conceptions and ideas are drawn from experience (not, perhaps, all immediately from experience, but experience lies at the bottom of them all), and no language, no information, no instruction, can do more for us than teach us the relation of the ideas which we have. Therefore, so far as we can judge, no words whatever that could have been used, no account or description that could have been written down, would have been able to convey to us a conception of our future state, constituted as our understandings now are. I am far from saying that it was not in the power of God, by immediate inspiration, to have struck light and ideas into our minds, of which naturally we have no conception. I am far from saying that he could not, by an act of his power, have assumed a human being, or the soul of a human being, into heaven; and have shown to him or it the nature and the glories of that kingdom: but it is evident that, unless the whole order of our present world be changed, such revelations as these must be rare; must be limited to very extraordinary persons, and very extraordinary occasions. And even then, with respect to others, it is to be observed that the ordinary modes of communication by speech or writing are inadequate to the transmitting of any knowledge or information of this sort: and from a cause, which has already been noticed, namely, that language deals only with the ideas which we have; that these ideas are all founded in experience; that probably, most probably indeed, the things of the next world are very remote from any experience which we have in this; the consequence of which is, that, though the inspired person might himself possess this super-

natural knowledge, he could not impart it to any other person not in like manner inspired. When, therefore, the nature and constitution of the human understanding are considered, it can excite no surprise, it ought to excite no complaint, it is no fair objection to Christianity, "that it doth not yet appear what we shall be." I do not say that the imperfection of our understanding forbids it (for, in strictness of speech, that is not imperfect which answers the purpose designed by it), but the present constitution of our understanding forbids it.

"It doth not yet appear," saith the apostle, "what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him." As if he had said, Though we be far from understanding the subject either accurately or clearly, or from having conceptions and notions adequate to the truth and reality of the case, yet we know something: this, for instance, we know, that "when he shall appear, we shall be like him." The best commentary upon this last sentence of Saint John's text may be drawn from the words of Saint Paul. His words state the same proposition more fully, when he tells us (Phil. iii. 21.) "that Christ shall change our vile body, that it may be like his glorious body." From the two passages together, we may lay down the following points. First, that we shall have bodies. One apostle informs us, that we shall be like him; the other, that our vile body shall be like his glorious body: therefore we shall have bodies. Secondly, that these bodies shall be greatly changed from what they are at present. If we had had nothing but Saint John's text to have gone upon, this would have been implied. "When he shall appear, we *shall* be like him." We are not like him now, we *shall be* like him; we shall hereafter be like him,

namely, when he shall appear. Saint John's words plainly regard this similitude as a future thing, as what we shall acquire, as belonging to what we shall become, in contradistinction to what we are. Therefore they imply a change which must take place in our bodily constitution. But what Saint John's words imply, Saint Paul's declare. "He shall change our vile bodies." That point, therefore, may be considered as placed out of question.

That such a change is necessary, that such a change is to be expected, is agreeable even to the established order of nature. Throughout the universe this rule holds, namely, that the body of every animal is suited to its state. Nay more; when an animal changes its state, it changes its body. When animals which lived under water afterwards live in air, their bodies are changed almost entirely, so as hardly to be known by any one mark of resemblance to their former figure; as, for example, from worms and caterpillars to flies and moths. These are common transformations; and the like happens when an animal changes its element from the water to the earth, or an insect from living under ground to flying abroad in the air. And these changes take place in consequence of that unalterable rule, that the body be fitted to the state; which rule obtains throughout every region of nature with which we are acquainted. Now our present bodies are by no means fitted for heaven. So saith Saint Paul expressly, "Flesh and blood *cannot* inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." Between our bodies as they are now constituted, and the state into which we shall come then, there is a physical, necessary, and invincible incongruity. Therefore they must undergo a change, and that change will, first, be uni-

versal, at least as to those who shall be saved; secondly, it will be sudden; thirdly, it will be very great. First, it will be universal. Saint Paul's words in the fifteenth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians are, "We shall all be changed." I do however admit, that this whole chapter of Saint Paul relates only to those who shall be saved; of no others did he intend to speak. This, I think, has been satisfactorily made out; but the argument is too long to enter upon at present. If so, the expression of the apostle, "We shall all be changed," proves only that we who are saved, who are admissible into his kingdom, shall be changed. Secondly, the change will be instantaneous. So Saint Paul describes it; "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the dead shall be raised incorruptible;" and therefore their nature must have undergone the change. Thirdly, it will be very great. No change, which we experience or see, can bear any assignable proportion to it in degree or importance. It is this corruptible putting on incorruption; it is this mortal putting on immortality. Now it has often been made a question, whether, after so great a change, the bodies, with which we shall be clothed, are to be deemed new bodies, or the same bodies under a new form. This is a question which has often been agitated; but the truth is, it is of no moment or importance. We continue the same, to all intents and purposes, so long as we are sensible and conscious that we are so. In this life our bodies are continually changing. Much, no doubt, and greatly is the body of every human being changed from his birth to his maturity: yet, because we are nevertheless sensible of what we are, sensible to ourselves that we are the same, we are in reality the same." Alterations, in the size or form of our visible persons, make no

change in that respect: nor would they, if they were much greater, as in some animals they are; or even if they were total. Vast, therefore, as that change must be, or rather, as the difference must be between our present and our future bodies, as to their substance, their nature, or their form, it will not hinder us from remaining the same, any more than the alterations which our bodies undergo in this life hinder us from remaining the same. We know within ourselves that we are the same, and that is sufficient; and this knowledge or consciousness we shall rise with from the grave, whatever be the bodies with which we be clothed.

The two apostles go one step further when they tell us, that we shall be like Christ himself; and that this likeness will consist in a resemblance to his glorified body. Now of the glorified body of Christ all that we know is this. At the transfiguration upon the mount, the three apostles saw the person of our Lord in a very different state from its ordinary state. "He was transfigured before them, and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." Saint Luke describes it thus: "The fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering: and, behold, there talked with him two men, who appeared in glory." Then he adds, "that the apostles, when they awaked, saw his glory." Now I consider this transaction as a specimen of the change of which a glorified body is susceptible. Saint Stephen, at his martyrdom, saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Saint Paul, at his conversion, saw a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about him; and in this light Christ then was. These instances, like the former,

only show the changes and the appearances of which a glorified body is susceptible, not the form or condition in which it must necessarily be found, or must always continue. You will observe, that it was necessary that the body of our Lord at his transfiguration, at his appearance after his resurrection, at his ascension into heaven, at his appearance to Stephen, should preserve a resemblance to his human person upon earth, because it was by that resemblance alone he could be known to his disciples, at least by any means of knowledge naturally belonging to them in that human state. But this was not always necessary, nor continues to be necessary: nor is there any sufficient reason to suppose that this resemblance to our present bodies will be retained in our future bodies, or be at all wanted. Upon the whole, the conclusions, which we seem authorised to draw from these intimations of Scripture, are,

First, that we shall have bodies.

Secondly, that they will be so far different from our present bodies, as to be suited, by that difference, to the state and life into which they are to enter, agreeably to that rule which prevails throughout universal nature; that the body of every being is suited to its state, and that, when it changes its state, it changes its body.

Thirdly, that it is a question by which we need not at all be disturbed, whether the bodies with which we shall arise be new bodies, or the same bodies under a new form; for,

Fourthly, no alteration will hinder us from remaining the same, provided we are sensible and conscious that we are so; any more than the changes which our visible person undergoes even in this life, and which

from infancy to manhood are undoubtedly very great, hinder us from being the same, to ourselves and in ourselves, and to all intents and purposes whatsoever.

Lastly, that though, from the imperfection of our faculties, we neither are, nor, without a constant miracle upon our minds, could be made, able to conceive or comprehend the nature of our future bodies; yet we are assured that the change will be infinitely beneficial; that our new bodies will be infinitely superior to those which we carry about with us in our present state; in a word, that whereas our bodies are now comparatively vile (and are so denominated), they will so far rise in glory, as to be made like unto his glorious body; that whereas, through our pilgrimage here, we have borne that which we inherited, the image of the earthy, of our parent the first Adam, created for a life upon this earth; we shall, in our future state, bear another image, a new resemblance, that of the heavenly inhabitant, the second man, the second nature, even that of the Lord from heaven.

XXIX.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF ONE ANOTHER IN A FUTURE STATE.

COL. I. 28.

Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man, in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

THESE words have a primary and a secondary use. In their first and most obvious view, they express the extreme earnestness and anxiety with which the apostle Paul sought the salvation of his converts. To bring men to Jesus Christ, and, when brought, to turn and save them from their sins, and to keep them steadfast unto the end in the faith and obedience to which they were called, was the whole work of the great apostle's ministry, the desire of his heart, and the labour of his life. It was that in which he spent all his time and all his thought; for the sake of which he travelled from country to country, warning every man, as he speaks in the text, and exhorting every man, enduring every hardship and every injury, ready at all times to sacrifice his life, and at last actually sacrificing it, in order to accomplish the great purpose of his mission, that he might at the last day present his beloved converts perfect in Christ Jesus. This is the direct scope of the text. But it is not for this that I have made choice of it. The last clause of the verse contains

within it, indirectly and by implication, a doctrine, certainly of great personal importance, and, I trust, also of great comfort to every man who hears me. The clause is this, "that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:" by which I understand Saint Paul to express his hope and prayer, that at the general judgement of the world, he might present to Christ the fruits of his ministry, the converts whom he had made to his faith and religion, and might present them perfect in every good work. And if this be rightly interpreted, then it affords a manifest and necessary inference, that the saints in a future life will meet and be known again to one another; for how, without knowing again his converts in their new and glorified state, could Saint Paul desire or expect to present them at the last day?

My brethren, this is a doctrine of real consequence. That we shall come again to a new life; that we shall, by some method or other, be made happy, or be made miserable, in that new state, according to the deeds done in the body, according as we have acted and governed ourselves in this world, is a point affirmed absolutely and positively, in all shapes, and under every variety of expression, in almost every page of the New Testament. It is the grand point inculcated from the beginning to the end of that book. But concerning the particular nature of the change we are to undergo, and in what is to consist the employment and happiness of those blessed spirits which are received into heaven, our information, even under the Gospel, is very limited. We own it is so. Even Saint Paul, who had extraordinary communications, confessed, "that in these things we see through a glass darkly." But at the same time that we acknowledge that we

know little, we ought to remember that, without Christ, we should have known nothing. It might not be possible, in our present state, to convey to us, by words, more clear or explicit conceptions of what will hereafter become of us; if possible, it might not be fitting. In that celebrated chapter, the 15th of 1 Corinthians, Saint Paul makes an inquisitive person ask, "How are the dead raised, and with what body do they come?" From his answer to this question we are able, I think, to collect thus much clearly and certainly: that at the resurrection we shall have bodies of some sort or other; that they will be totally different from, and greatly excelling, our present bodies, though possibly in some manner or other proceeding from them, as a plant from its seed; that as there exists in nature a great variety of animal substances; one flesh of man, another of beasts, another of birds, another of fishes; as there exist also great differences in the nature, dignity, and splendour of inanimate substances, "one glory of the sun, another of the moon, another of the stars;" so there subsist, likewise, in the magazines of God Almighty's creation, two very distinct kinds of bodies (still both bodies), a natural body and a spiritual body: that the natural body is what human beings bear about with them now; the spiritual body, far surpassing the other, what the blessed will be clothed with hereafter. "Flesh and blood," our apostle teaches, "cannot inherit the kingdom of God;" that is, is by no means suited to that state, is not capable of it. Yet living men are flesh and blood; the dead in the graves are the remains of the same; wherefore to make all, who are Christ's, capable of entering into his eternal kingdom, and at all fitted for it, a great change shall be suddenly wrought. As well all the just, who shall be alive at the coming of

Christ (whenever that event takes place), as those who shall be raised from the dead, shall in the twinkling of an eye be changed. Bodies they shall retain still, but so altered in form and fashion, in nature and substance, that "this corruptible shall put on incorruption;" what is now necessarily mortal, and necessarily perishable, shall acquire a fixed and permanent existence. And this is agreeable to, or rather the same thing as, what our apostle delivers in another epistle, where he teaches us, that "Christ shall change our vile body that it may be like his glorious body;" a change so great, so stupendous, that he justly styles it an act of omnipotence, "according," says he, "to the mighty working, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself." Since, then, a great alteration will take place in the frame and constitution of the bodies with which we shall be raised, from those which we carry with us to the grave, it requires some authority or passage of Scripture to prove that, after this change, and in this new state, we shall be known again to one another; that those who know each other on earth will know each other in heaven. I do allow that the general strain of Scripture seems to suppose it; that when Saint Paul speaks "of the spirits of just men made perfect," and of their "coming to the general assembly of saints," it seems to import that we should be known of them, and of one another; that when Christ declares, "that the secrets of the heart shall be disclosed," it imports that they shall be disclosed to those who were before the witnesses of our actions. I do also think that it is agreeable to the dictates of reason itself to believe that the same great God, who brings men to life again, will bring those together whom death has separated. When his power is at work in this

great dispensation, it is very probable that this should be a part of his gracious design. But for a specific text I know none which speaks the thing more positively than this which I have chosen. Saint Paul, you see, expected that he should know, and be known to, those his converts; that their relation should subsist and be retained between them; and with this hope he laboured and endeavoured, instantly and incessantly, that he might be able at last to present them, and to present them perfect in Christ Jesus. Now what Saint Paul appeared to look for as to the general continuance, or rather revival, of our knowledge of each other after death, every man who strives, like Saint Paul, to attain to the resurrection of the dead, may expect, as well as he.

Having discoursed thus far concerning the article of doctrine itself, I will now proceed to enforce such practical reflections as result from it. Now it is necessary for you to observe, that all which is here produced from Scripture concerning the resurrection of the dead relates solely to the resurrection of the just. It is of them only that Saint Paul speaks in the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians. It is of the body of him, who is accepted in Christ, that the apostle declares that it "is sown in dishonour, but raised in glory; sown in weakness, raised in power." Likewise, when he speaks, in another place, of "Christ's changing our vile bodies that they may be like his glorious body;" it is of the bodies of Christ's saints alone, of whom this is said. This point is, I think, agreed upon amongst learned men, and is indeed very plain. In like manner, in the passage of the text, and, I think, it will be found true of every other in which mankind knowing one another in a future life is implied, the implication extends only

to those who are received amongst the blessed. Whom was Saint Paul to know? even those whom he was to present perfect in Ghrist Jesus. Concerning the reprobate and rejected, whether they will not be banished from the presence of God, and from all their former relations; whether they will not be lost, as to all happiness of their own, so to the knowledge of those who knew them in this mortal state, we have from Scripture no assurance or intimation whatever. One thing seems to follow with probability from the nature of the thing, namely, that if the wicked be known to one another in a state of perdition, their knowledge will only serve to aggravate their misery.

What then is the inference from all this? Do we seek, do we covet earnestly to be restored to the society of those who were once near and dear to us, and who are gone before? It is only by leading godly lives that we can hope to have this wish accomplished. Should we prefer, to all delights, to all pleasures in the world, the satisfaction of meeting again, in happiness and peace, those whose presence, whilst they were amongst us, made up the comfort and enjoyment of our lives? It must be by giving up our sins, by parting with our criminal delights and guilty pursuits, that we can ever expect to attain to this satisfaction. Is there a great difference between the thought of losing those we love for ever, of taking at their deaths or our own an eternal farewell, never to see them more; and the reflection that we are about to be separated, for a few years at the longest, to be united with them in a new and better state of mutual existence; is there, I say, a difference to the heart of man between these two things? And does it not call upon us to strive, with redoubled endeavours, that the case truly may turn out

so? The more and more we reflect upon the difference, between the consequences of a lewd, unthinking, careless, profane, dishonest life, and a life of religion, sobriety, seriousness, good actions and good principles, the more we shall see the madness and stupidity of the one and the true solid wisdom of the other. This is one of the distinctions. If we go on in our sins, we are not to expect to awaken to a joyful meeting with our friends, and relatives, and dear connexions. If we turn away from our sins, and take up religion in earnest, we may. My brethren, religion disarms even death: it disarms it of that which is its bitterness and its sting, the power of dividing those who are dear to one another. But this blessing, like every blessing which it promises, is only to the just and good, to the penitent and reformed, to those who are touched at the heart with a sense of its importance; who know thoroughly and experimentally, who feel, in their inward mind and consciences, that religion is the only course that can end well: that can bring either them or theirs to the presence of God, blessed for evermore; that can cause them, after the toils of life and struggle of death are over, to meet again in a joyful deliverance from the grave; in a new and never-ceasing happiness, in the presence and society of one another.

XXX.

THE GENERAL RESURRECTION.

JOHN v. 28, 29.

The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

THESE words are so important, that if Jesus Christ had never delivered any other; if he had come into the world and pronounced only this simple declaration, and proved the *truth* and *certainty* of it by the miracles which he wrought, he would have left enough to have guided his followers to everlasting happiness: he would have done more towards making mankind virtuous and happy than all the teachers and all the wisdom that ever appeared upon earth had done before him. We should each and every one of us have owed more to him for this single piece of intelligence than we owe to our parents, our dearest friend, or the best benefactor we have. This text is the poor man's creed. It is his religion: it is to be imprinted upon his memory, and upon his heart: it is what the most simple can understand: it is what, when understood and believed, excels all the knowledge and learning in the universe: it is what we are to carry about with us in our thoughts,

daily remember, and daily reflect upon—remember, not only at church, not only in our devotions, or in our set meditations, but in our business, our pleasures, in whatever we intend, plan, or execute, whatever we think about, or whatever we set about—remember, that "they that have done good shall come unto the resurrection of life; they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."

Reflect what great things this short sentence contains. It teaches us, beyond contradiction, that all does not end here: that our happiness or misery is not over at our death: that a new state of things will begin with every one of us, and that in a short time. This point, I say, our Saviour proves beyond contradiction: and how does he prove it? By healing the sick, by restoring sight to the blind, by raising the dead, by various astonishing and incontestable miracles; and above all, by coming himself to life again, after being three days dead and buried, he *proved* that God Almighty was with him; that he came from God; that he knew what passed in the other world; that he had God's own authority to say and promise this to mankind. Upon the faith and trust of this promise, we know that we shall rise again: all are equally assured of it, from the highest to the lowest. Wise and learned men thought indeed the same thing before: they concluded it to be so from probable argument and reasonings; but this was not like having it, as we have it, from God himself; or, what is just the same thing, from the mouth of a person, to whom God gave witness by signs and wonders, and mighty deeds. They were far short of our certainty, who did study it the deepest. There were but few who could study or comprehend it at all. Blessed be God, we are all informed, we are all,

from the most learned to the most ignorant, made sure and certain of it.

Having then this great doctrine secured, that we shall all come again into a new world and a new life; the next great point, which every serious mind will turn to, the second grand question to be asked, is, who are to be happy, and who will be miserable in that other state? The text satisfies us completely upon this head. You ask, who shall come to the resurrection of life? The text replies, they that have done good. Observe well, and never forget this answer. It is not the wise, the learned, the great, the honoured, the professor of this or that doctrine, the member of this church, or the maintainer of that article of faith, but *he* that doeth good; *he*, of whatever quality or condition, who strives honestly to make his life of service to those about him; to be useful in his calling, and to his generation; to his family, to his neighbourhood, and, according to his ability, to his country and to mankind; "he that doeth good." All the rest, without this, goes for nothing: though he understand the things of religion ever so well, or believe ever so rightly—though he cry, "Lord, Lord!"—be he ever so constant and devout in his prayers, or talk ever so much, or so well, or so earnestly for religion—unless he *do* good; unless his actions, and dealings, and behaviour come up to his knowledge and his discourse; correspond with his outward profession and belief, it will avail him nothing; he is not the man, to whom Jesus Christ hath promised in the text, that he shall come to the resurrection of life. The issue of life and death is put upon our conduct and behaviour; that is made the *test* we are to be tried by.

Again: when we read in Scripture, when we know from positive and undoubted authority, that misery and

destruction, ruin, torment, and damnation are reserved for some, it is surely the most natural, the most interesting of all inquiries, to know for whom. The text tell us, "for them that have done evil."

Here let the timorous conscience take courage. It is not any man's errors, or ignorance; his want of understanding, or education, or ability, that will be laid to his charge at the day of judgement, or that will bring him into danger of the damnation which the Gospel threatens; it is *having done evil;* having wilfully gone about to disobey what he knew to be the will and command of his Creator, by committing mischief, and doing wrong and injury to his fellow-creatures.

Let the bold and presumptuous sinner hear this text with fear and trembling. Let him, who cares not what misery he occasions, what evil and harm he does, if he can but compass his purpose, carry his own end, or serve his wicked lusts and pleasures; let him, I say, be given to understand what he has to look for: "He that doeth evil shall come to the resurrection of damnation." This is absolute, final, and peremptory; here is no exception, no excuse, no respect of person or condition.

They that have done good shall come again unto the resurrection of life. But, alas! I hear you say, What good can I do? my means and my opportunities are too small and straitened to think of doing good. You do not sufficiently reflect what doing good is. You are apt to confine the notion of it to giving to others, and giving liberally. This, no doubt, is right and meritorious: but it is certainly not in every man's power; comparatively speaking, it is, indeed, in the power of very few. But doing good is of a much more general nature, and is, in a greater or less degree, practicable by all. For whenever we make one human

creature happier or better than he would have been without our help, then we do good. And when we do this from a proper motive, that is, with a sense and a desire of pleasing God by doing it, then we do good in the true sense of the text, and of God's gracious promise. Now let every one, in particular, reflect, whether, in this sense, he has not some good in his power: some within his own doors, to his family, his children, his kindred; by his labour, his authority, his example, by bringing them up, and keeping them in the way of passing their lives honestly, and quietly, and usefully. What good more important, more practicable than this is? Again, something may be done beyond our own household: by acts of tenderness and kindness, of help and compassion to our neighbours. Not a particle of this will be lost. It is all set down in the book of life; and happy are they who have much there! And again, if any of us be really sorry that we have not so much in our power as we would desire, let us remember this short rule—that since we can do little good, to take care that we do no harm. Let us show our sincerity by our innocence: that, at least, is always in our power.

Finally: let us reflect, that in the habitations of life are many mansions; rewards of various orders and degrees, proportioned to our various degrees of virtue and exertion here. "He that soweth plenteously shall reap plenteously." We can never do too much; never be too earnest in doing good; because every good action here will, we are certain, be an addition of happiness hereafter; will advance us to a better condition in the life to come, whatever be our lot or success in this. God will not fail of his promise. He hath commissioned his beloved Son to tell us, that they that have

done good shall enter into the resurrection of life. Let us humbly and thankfully accept his gracious offer. We have but one business in this world—it is to strive to make us worthy of a better. Whatever this trial may cost us; how long, how earnestly, how patiently soever, through whatever difficulties, by whatever toils we endeavour to obey and please our Maker, we are supported in them by this solid and never-ceasing consolation—"that our labour is not in vain in the Lord."

XXXI.

DIFFERENT DEGREES OF FUTURE REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS.

JOHN v. 29.

They that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.

THERE is a difference introduced into religion of this sort. From the text—from the mention made of separation merely, and placing one sort on the right hand and the other on the left—from the familiar notions and method of speaking of heaven and hell, of salvation and perdition, we are led to imagine that the human species at the day of judgement will be divided into two kinds—that the one will be advanced in heaven to supreme happiness; that the other will be consigned in hell to extreme misery. This is a way of thinking we may easily and naturally fall into; but when we come to consider it further, there are two or three principal difficulties attending this opinion on the subject.

First; it seems a defect in the Christian religion, that it nowhere points out the precise quantity of innocence or virtue sufficient for our salvation, or necessary to entitle us to admission into heaven.

Secondly; that there is no encouragement, according to this account, to go beyond, or strive after a superior degree of holiness.

Thirdly; that we cannot easily comprehend how it should be a just dispensation of Providence to advance one part of mankind to supreme happiness, and commit the other to extreme misery, when there cannot be much to choose beween the worst of the one sort, and the best of the other—between the best who are excluded from heaven, and the worst who are received into it.

Now for the satisfaction of these several doubts and difficulties, I shall endeavour to show, that it is most agreeable to our conception of divine justice, and also consonant to the language of Scripture, to suppose that there are prepared for us rewards and punishments of all possible degrees and varieties, from the most exalted happiness down to extreme misery; upon which plan satisfactory answers may be given to all the difficulties just now stated.

First; that it is in its nature impossible, and upon this plan needless, to ascertain the precise quantity of virtue necessary to salvation.

Secondly; that upon this plan our labour is never in vain—that we have encouragement to proceed from virtue to virtue, from one degree of goodness to another, till we attain the utmost which our ability and opportunity admit of.

Thirdly; that this plan totally subverts all objection to the divine economy, in not adapting the degrees of reward and punishment, to the degrees of virtue and vice.

These points I shall speak to distinctly, and in their order. It is most agreeable to our natural conceptions of justice to suppose that there are prepared for us rewards and punishments of every possible degree. It is hardly necessary to contend that there exists an

almost infinite variety of virtue and vice, of merit and demerit, in different persons. The conduct of any great number of persons is seldom alike, or the same, though they may be all virtuous, or all innocent, or all vicious; but that is not the whole. The same conduct is capable of very different degrees of virtue or guilt, according to the abilities, the opportunities, and the temptations. In acts of goodness, the merit will be proportionably increased, as the abilities to perform them are less, and as greater acts of self-denial and exertion are requisite. The opportunities, which happen to different men of doing good, are also very various, and constitute a proportionable variety in the character; for every opportunity neglected becomes a vice. In estimating the guilt of criminal actions, it would be extremely unfair to have no consideration by which the criminal was urged. A man who steals for want is wrong, but it would be hard to place the crime upon a level with his who steals to support his vices, to indulge his vanity, to supply his pleasures. Now the actual conduct of different persons being different, and the same conduct differing in merit and demerit, according to the daily opportunity and temptation which the agent experienced, all which circumstances are subject to a multiplied variety; it must follow, that guilt and virtue in different individuals differ in every possible degree—that whatever reason there is to expect from the Divine Being that he will reward virtue and punish vice at all, we have the same reason to expect, as far as the light of nature goes, that he will adapt his rewards and punishments in exact proportion to the virtue or guilt of those who stand at his judgement seat. Very true it is not thus in human judicature. The same punishment is inflicted upon crimes of very

different colour and malignancy; and crimes of the same denomination have very different guilt in different persons and different circumstances. But this is a defect in human laws, and proceeds from a defect of power. We have no knowledge of each other's motives and circumstances, to be able to ascertain with precision our mutual merit or guilt; or, if we could, there exists not within the compass of human treatment that precise gradation of punishment which is necessary to a perfect retribution of so much pain for so much guilt; but no such defect either of knowledge or power can be imputed to the Deity. He knows the secrets of our hearts, the true motive and the exact value of every virtue, all the circumstances of aggravation and mitigation which attend every crime; and he can form and mould his creatures, so as to make them susceptible of every degree of happiness, and of every degree of misery. But in truth, this part of the subject, the consistency of the plan with natural reason and justice, admits of little doubt: the only doubt, if any, is whether it be sufficiently consonant with the several declarations of Scripture.

I propose to show but three passages of Scripture, which expressly affirm this difference and gradation of rewards and punishments, and that there are none inconsistent with it. Passages to this effect are, first, Luke xii. 47. The servant which knew his Lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. Here different degrees of punishment are plainly asserted. Both were evil doers, but in a different degree. Accordingly both were to be punished, but with a proportionable dif-

ference—both were to be beaten, but one with many stripes, the other with few. A diversity of rewards is also to be collected from the parable of the ten pieces of money, as recorded in the 19th chapter of Saint Luke. "And he called his ten servants, and delivered unto them ten pounds; and when he returned, the first came, saying, Thy pound hath gained ten pounds; and he said unto him, Well done, thou good servant; because thou hast been faithful over a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds; and he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities." Here you observe, both were virtuous, both were rewarded; but the virtue and diligence of the one was double that of the other, and his reward was double. When our Saviour speaks of the last in the kingdom of heaven, it shows that there are greater and less in that kingdom. When he says that it shall be more tolerable in the day of judgement for Tyre and Sidon than for Chorazin and Bethsaida, by reason of the different warnings they had received, it shows that of the punishment to be denounced at that awful day, some will be more tolerable and some more severe. These are our Saviour's own declarations: Saint Paul supposes different degrees of punishment in the 10th chapter of Hebrews, 28, 29th verses: "He that despised Moses's law died without mercy; of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?" And still more positively he notices the difference, in the rewards we are to expect, proportioned to our different merit, 2 Cor. ix. 6: "This I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." These words are directly

to our purpose; we are authorised to say, therefore, that there are passages of Scripture which plainly suppose a distinction of rewards, and a distinction of punishments.

And we further say, that there are none which contradict it. It is true there are various passages of Scripture which speak of a place of happiness, and a place of misery, of being received into, and sitting down in the kingdom of heaven, and of being thrust out into outer darkness where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched—of the children of God, and the children of the devil—of saving the soul and losing it: these, at first sight, and strictly taken, seem to intimate that there are two, and only two states, one of great happiness, and the other of great misery; and that one or other of these two conditions is to be the destiny of every man. But if you come to consider these expressions, what is there in them after all? Do not we ourselves perpetually speak of the good and the bad, of the righteous and the wicked, of virtue and vice, of well doers and evil doers? Yet do these expressions imply, or are the persons who use them understood to assert, that all the good are equally good, and all the bad equally bad? that because we mention only two distinctions of actions—of virtue and vice—that there are only two—that there are not also degrees and distinctions in different virtues and betwixt different vices? In like manner we speak of happiness and misery, and of many men as either enjoying the one or suffering the other; but do these terms exclude all degrees of difference in happiness and misery? Do they import that the happy are equally blessed, or the miserable equally wretched? If, therefore, no such construction is to be put on the terms and phrases we are

every day using, is it to be insisted on, or supposed to be intended, in similar terms and phrases when they occur in Scripture?

Having then shown that it is both reasonable and scriptural to believe that there are prepared for us rewards and punishments of every possible degree, from the highest happiness down to extreme misery; I proceed to consider the uses to be made of the doctrine, for the purpose of resolving the difficulties and objections before stated. And first, as to the objection that is made to the Scriptures, that they have not defined with exactness the precise quantity of virtue necessary to salvation. We conceive that this, so far as we can judge, was impracticable, and upon the plan we have explained unnecessary. It is impracticable,—for however a revelation be imparted originally to the prophet or apostle, who receives the inspiration from God, it must be communicated from him to others, by the ordinary and natural vehicle of language. It behoves those who make the objection to show that any form of words could be devised, which might express this quantity, or that it is possible to constitute such a standard of moral attainments, accommodated to the almost infinite diversities which subsist in the capacities and opportunities of different men. Would it be equitable, according to our conceptions of equity, to exact the same from an unbelieving Indian, that might reasonably be required of a well-informed Christian? and if you attempt to compute the degrees that exist between these two extremes, they will soon be found too numerous and too various to be ascertained by any description which words can convey. Secondly; it is unnecessary—for upon the plan of a gradation of rewards and punishments, whatever advancement we make in virtue,

we procure a proportionable accession of future happiness; as on the other hand, any accumulation of vice is the treasuring up so much wrath against the day of wrath; which is all that is needful for us to know or to act upon. And this contains an answer to the objection, that there is no encouragement to strive after superior attainments in virtue and holiness. According to this account there is the greatest. In our Father's house are many mansions, of different capacities for happiness; and it is our business, as it is in our power, to promote and advance our good hereafter, by suitable endeavours and exertions here. Again, we are thus enabled to reply to the difficulty that has been started, that this distribution of rewards and punishments into heaven and hell, into a state of happiness and a state of misery, cannot easily be reconciled to practice, because there must be little to choose between the worst who are received into the kingdom of heaven, and the best who are excluded; for how know we but that there may be little to choose in these conditions? It will be so upon the supposition (which appears so agreeable to reason and Scripture), that the various conditions of our future life will descend by insensible steps from extreme happiness to extreme misery.

Lastly; the whole doctrine, and these several observations upon it, all meet in one point, tending to establish that one magnificent conclusion—that be our endeavours after virtue ever so vigorous, continued or well directed, our labour is not in vain. We know in whom we trust,—that from his righteous judgement we may look for a full and complete reward—for a crown of glory and bliss, not only proportioned to, but exceeding, all we may, as well as can, either conceive or desire.

XXXII.

THE BEING OF GOD DEMONSTRATED IN THE WORKS OF CREATION *.

(PART I.)

HEBREWS XI. 3.

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

THE belief of a God is the corner-stone of all religion. Whatever a man's persuasion, whether he be Christian, Jew, Mahometan, or Pagan, this is the point assented to by all; because, without this, if there be in truth no God, all religions are equally vain. It is said that there neither is, nor ever was, a country or nation in the whole world that did not believe a God in some way, how much soever disguised and corrupted; whatever senseless opinions and absurd and barbarous rites were mixed up with it; whatever superstructure of superstition and idolatry had been built upon it, still there was a belief of God at the bottom. Whether this be exactly true or not, I do not know; but it is undoubtedly true that, if there be any tribe of men without the notion of a God, it is some tribe so stupid and savage, so destitute of all heed and consideration, as to be, in the concerns of religion, precisely in the condition of a child of two or three years old: there may be,

* The few following Sermons may seem placed out of their order; but they are added as Protographs of the Natural Theology and the Evidences of Christianity. They appear to have been written between 1780 and 1790.

perhaps, some few who are taken up entirely with things present, with sensual and animal gratifications, without any more idea of religion, or of what is to become of them after death, or of a God ruling and existing above them, than an infant has among us—possibly there may be a very few such: but of all others, of all the civilized, of all the rational, of all the cultivated parts of the world, it may be affirmed with certainty, that the belief in a God is universal. Now, undoubtedly, there must be some strong plain reason for this opinion, that would strike the understanding of mankind in all ages and countries so forcibly as to produce such a universal agreement amongst them: distant regions and distant ages could never all hit upon the same conclusion, if there was not some evident proof that led them to it—some argument comprehended, that carried irresistibly to the same truth. Which argument is no other than simply this: marks of contrivance in nature abound every where about us; therefore there must have been a contriver: proofs of design and intention are to be seen on all hands; therefore there must have been some one to have designed and intended. But this we are clear in; that no human being, no being we see upon the face of the earth, could be the author of these contrivances: therefore it must be some other being, whom we do not see. This is the upshot of the argument: and it is not an argument for scholars only, for men of study and learning; it is an argument open and level to every capacity in the world—a sensible husbandman, and a sensible mechanic, who think at all, will see thus far as perfectly as the best scholar in the world. Does any one doubt that vegetation was a thing designed? The seed, the blade, the stem, the flower, the ear; the whole process, from the first budding to final decay, was a process planned and laid down. I say, that proofs

of contrivance, and design, and intent abound. Does any man doubt but that the eyes in our head were designed, intended, and contrived to see with; that the tongue was designed to speak, the teeth to eat, the hands and fingers to handle and touch, the feet to walk with? If there be a man breathing who doubts of this, that man can be convinced of nothing. Well then, if they were so designed, they must have been designed by some one; if they were contrived for these purposes, there must have been a contriver. Surely, this is plain. But we are very certain that no being which we see did make or contrive these things. Who could make or contrive them? No man in the world, not all the men in the world, could make the eyes of a single insect, the limb of a fly, the feather of a bird, the scale of a fish, a grain of corn, or even a leaf of the vilest weed that grows upon the road-side. This, I think, will be allowed. Seeing these things were contrived and designed for the various uses which they serve, by some being or other; and since they certainly were not contrived or designed by men, or by any body that we see upon the face of the earth, there must necessarily be some other being, whom we do not see, that was the maker, author, and contriver of all these wonderful effects. I have said that this argument is intelligible to the simplest man living; it is no other than briefly this.—Suppose, in walking upon a wide common, we should trip upon the stone lying upon the ground: if we were asked how the stone came there, possibly we might answer, that, for any thing we knew, it had lain there for ever; and it might not be very easy to show that there was any absurdity in this answer. But suppose we had met with a watch lying on the ground, and you should ask how it came to

pass that a watch was in that place, we should never think of the answer we gave to the same question before—that, for any thing that appeared to us, it might have lain there for ever. And why might not this answer serve for the watch, as it did for the stone; why was it not as reasonable in the one case as the other?—on this plain account—because, when we examine the watch, we perceive that its several parts are planned, contrived, and put together with design, and for a purpose; that they are so constructed as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day: from whence we are perfectly certain that it must have had a maker; that there must have been some one, at some time, and in some place, who planned, and intended, and fashioned it, in the manner and for the purpose for which we see it planned and fashioned; who governed, constructed, and designed its use. Now, if there was no artist that we knew or had seen who was capable of making such an instrument, that surely would be no objection to the certainty of what we had concluded—that it was made by art. It would only prove that the artist, whoever he was, that fabricated this machine, existed in some other country, or at some former time. The brief statement of the case is this:—Whatever reason we have to believe that every house must have had a builder, that a watch must have had a maker, that a book must have had an author; that very same reason we have to know that the world must have had a Creator: the one is just as certain as the other; the proof is the same in both. There is, indeed, a difference in the two cases, which is this; that whereas, in the works of men's hands, every individual piece of art is made by its artist, every individual house has its builder, every

single watch has its maker, every particular book has its author and printer; whereas, I say, this is the case with works of art, the works of nature, on the contrary, produce one another. Plants produce plants of the same kind—animals beget and bring forth other animals of the same species; and thus the race and succession is kept up for ever. We must be all sensible of this difference between nature and art. One watch never produces another watch, as one animal does another animal. Now this difference, I say, greatly magnifies the contrivance on the part of nature, above all the attempts of art, and makes the proof of contrivance proportionably stronger. Suppose a watch could be so wonderfully made, as not only to go with perfect exactness itself, but so constructed within as to produce in the course of its motion other machines of the same kind; to contain within itself such mould and machinery as to cast and frame individuals like itself; would not this add exceedingly to the curiosity and art of the contrivance? As this required a mechanism vastly more intricate, vastly more complete, so would it proportionably raise our admiration of the maker's skill and ingenuity: and if the simple machine, of itself, proved undeniably, by the very examination of it, that it must have had a contriver, and a contriver too of great skill and art—much more, with this improvement, with this new and additional property, would it demonstrate the same thing. Now what we should so much wonder at in a piece of machinery or clock-work, namely, the power of producing its like, and which never has been compassed in any piece of machinery yet, is the very fact in the works of nature, and is as much a part of the contrivance, and surely as admirable and astonishing a part of the contrivance, as any other. We will not,

therefore, be so absurd as to say that an animal or plant, for instance, without this property, would be exactly like a watch or a clock, in respect to its being contrived, and would equally prove that it must have had a contriver—but that with this property, which is indeed a prodigious improvement, it does not prove the same thing. We cannot, I say, be so absurd as to argue thus. And yet, in fact, the circumstance of animals and plants being produced from parent animals and parent plants takes off greatly our notice from the original maker and contriver of them all; because we do not see the artist, as it were, at work, as if he delivered each individual from his own hand, or produced each plant and animal by an immediate act of creation. We say the parent bird produces its young: yet it is no more the parent animal that makes the young animal, than it is the husbandman who sows the seed that makes the young plant grow out of it;—it is not he that makes the corn spring up; first the blade, then the stem, then the ear, then the seed in the ear; nor do we ever imagine it. Therefore I wish to have this well impressed and understood; that if the formation of a plant or animal proves a maker and contriver, as much, at least, as the mechanism of a watch or clock proves a maker and contriver; not less certainly, but much more so, does it prove it, when there is added to the plant or animal this new and surprising power, which excels all the rest, namely, that of producing another.

We conclude then, with most undoubting assurance, that all things about us had a maker; because we have precisely the same ground for our opinion that we have for saying every house must have had a builder, or every watch. The plain mark of contrivance is the proof in both cases. But the force and impression of

the proof will, in a great measure, depend upon the observation we make of these contrivances ourselves. A few instances that we discover, or even take notice of, of our own accord, will strike us more powerfully than a hundred that are related by others, and more powerfully a great deal than any general argumentation upon the subject. And this brings me to what I would most earnestly recommend to any one who hears me, namely, a way and habit of remarking and contemplating the works and mysteries of nature. It is a delightful and reasonable and pious exercise of our thoughts—it is oftentimes the very first thing that leads to a religious disposition. The best, and greatest, and wisest men in all ages were they who made this use of their understandings, and this application of their studies. But what is more—it is in a sufficient degree open to the level of every capacity. We are not to excuse ourselves, by saying such things are above our comprehension: this is not above any man's comprehension. The very herbage which he walks upon in his fields, the grass he uses for his cattle, the lambs of his flock, and the herds grazing around him; the birds of the air, and the very insects on the wing, may discover evident marks of design, and undeniable tokens of intention and contrivance: and it must and ought to be a great consolation to us all, that this point at least is certain; that whatever difficulties or disputes there be in religion, one thing, however, is clear; that in this world of darkness, sorrow, and confusion, we have this firm foundation to rest our foot upon—that there is a God above—that there is a king, whom we do not see, who is the artificer and framer, the author, cause, and contriver, of every thing which we do see.

XXXIII.

THE BEING OF GOD DEMONSTRATED IN THE WORKS OF CREATION.

(PART II.)

HEBREWS XI. 3.

Through faith we understand that the worlds were formed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

IN a former discourse upon this text, I undertook to show that we have as much reason to know that the world had a creator as we have for knowing that every house had a builder, or every watch a maker; and that as we are very sure that no being, whom we see or are acquainted with, could make the world, we rightly conclude that it must be some being whom we do not see. This reasoning seems as short and plain as any thing can be, yet the impression and force of it is not always felt by us so strongly as might be expected. I will therefore, in the following discourse, point out some of the causes which shut out this argument, in some measure, from our thoughts, or rather take off our observation from the proofs and evidences of God's agency and existence, which on every hand surround us.

Now one thing which diminishes greatly man's conviction of the being and power of God, especially with persons who do not bestow much thought upon the

subject, is, that they do not see him: "No man hath seen God at any time;" and the want of this, of actually perceiving him with our senses, has a very considerable effect upon the persuasion of all who are not accustomed to reflection. The evidence of our senses, or the testimony of other men's, is the strong and natural proof of the reality and existence of most things, and with many, the only proof they will attend to. To believe any thing to exist and act, which yet cannot be seen or felt, and which no man hath seen or felt, requires a reach of thought which many, from want of habits of seriousness and meditation, do not attain to. We see and hear one another, and therefore doubt not of one another's existence. We do not see God and hear him, and therefore it is to reason and argument we must appeal, to be satisfied of his existence. There are, I am confident, reasons and arguments, so strong and plain, that no man can well withstand them, or not have his judgement convinced by them; yet still the fact of never seeing this great being, or perceiving him with our senses, brings upon the subject a kind of suspense and hesitation. The most natural way of delivering our thoughts from any doubts on this account is, to consider that there are many other things besides the Deity, of the existence and reality of which we have no doubt, nor can have any doubt, which nevertheless we do not see, nor can see, nor ever were seen. A stone drops to the ground: something must draw it thither—something must influence and act upon it, to cause it to fall down rather than fly upwards—to urge it constantly to seek and press towards the lowest place rather than any other part, or in any other direction; yet no eye can see what it is that thus acts upon the stone. Shall we therefore say that

nothing acts upon it? That this constant and powerful effect has no cause to produce it, because we perceive none with our senses? This is one plain instance. Here is something of vast efficacy and activity, which is spread and diffused through every part of space that we are acquainted with. Go where we will, we meet with it—in ourselves—in every thing about us. Whatever has weight (and all bodies have it more or less) feels and suffers the influence of this universal agent; yet nothing is to be seen all the while—no visible stream or fluid driving or carrying all bodies to the centre—no discernible pull or hold which drags them to it. Another similar example may be taken from the loadstone. It draws a needle towards it. Something or other must pass between it and the needle to produce this effect, yet nothing is seen. This property in the loadstone necessarily depends upon some body communicating between it and the needle, yet no communication is in the smallest degree perceptible. We cannot divide the existence of this communicating substance, because we see effects which cannot be accounted for without it; yet it is a substance as impossible to be found out by sight or touch as the essence of the Deity. The same needle, which is touched with the loadstone, immediately turns to the north and south—if it has liberty to move, it will rest in no other position. Now it must have received something from the loadstone to give it this new and strange property—but what? Nothing that we can discover by our senses. Examine the needle as you will, you will find nothing in it different from what it had before—no change, no addition is to be perceived—yet a great change is wrought—a great addition is made to the former properties of the needle. What is said of the loadstone is true also of

another surprising quality of bodies—electricity. By the mere rubbing of a glass or plate, a metal may be made to gather from it a quantity of something or other, so strong and violent in its effects as to kill the person who touches it; yet nothing is seen to be collected by the glass, or given to the metal—nothing is perceived to cover the surface of either, or to rest upon it, till the dreadful shock we receive from it informs us that there is something present which cannot be seen, and which, though unseen, possesses irresistible strength and efficacy. Certainly, therefore, there are in nature—near us also, and about us, pervading and filling, likewise, every part of space we are acquainted with—powerful and active substances which yet are totally invisible to human eyes. What difficulty, then, in conceiving that the great and mighty cause of all things should exist, and perceive, and act, and be present through all nature, and all regions of nature, and yet remain imperceptible to our senses otherwise than by his effects—should see all things, yet himself be unseen—should be about our path and about our bed, not far from every one of us, and yet invisible—should know what passes both around us and within us, and yet himself be concealed from our eyes? We see not our own souls—what it is within us which thinks; nor can we find it out by dissecting or scrutinizing human bodies ever so exactly; much less are our senses capable of piercing that infinite spirit which fills and governs the universe.

Another cause, that hides the operations of God from our thoughts, is a certain manner of speaking into which we have fallen. We are accustomed to say that *nature* does this, and *nature* does that—that nature makes the earth to shoot forth its vegetation in the spring, and to ripen its grains and fruits in the autumn.

If a person appear surprised at the way a bird builds its nest, broods over its eggs, hatches its young, and trains up its offspring, we think we satisfy him by telling him it is all nature's work and nature's doing—it is the law and ordinance of nature. Or do we happen to admire the growth of a plant, to see the seed appear, the blade spring out, the leaves and flowers one after another open and unfold themselves, the new grain or fruit gradually formed, fed, and matured by the parent stem, all proceeding through their several changes in due and constant order? Or are we surprised to see the same plot of ground, the same lump of earth, at once producing and supporting a hundred different kinds of plants, which, though so various and unlike, all draw nourishment and subsistence from the same heap of mould? We are told that these things indeed are very curious, but it is nothing more than *natural;* it is the *nature* of such seeds to germinate and grow, and it is the *nature* of the earth or the soil to yield and bring forth herbs and plants of all variety and distinctions of colour, form, and fragrance; and this is an answer that lays asleep our curiosity and stops our inquiry. Now what all the while does this same *nature* mean? What does it amount to? If, when we call a thing the work of nature, we mean only to say that it is not the work of art, that it is not a man's doing, we speak rationally and truly: but if we carry the matter farther, and by talking of or considering the works of nature, we begin to suppose there is such a thing in reality as nature, which actually performs and produces the works and effects we ascribe to it, we lead our inquiries into the same error; for take any of the expressions we commonly make use of, such as that nature teaches the parent bird to build its nest, what else does *nature* in this sentence mean? If it means that God,

the author and framer of all things—of the least as well as the largest parts of the creation—that God, I say, teaches, or prompts, or impels the bird to this office, or that he used a train of causes to do this, it means what is very true; but then we had better say so at once, or at least carry this signification in our thoughts, though we clothe it in some different form of words. So, in like manner, when we assert that it is nature, or that it is the force of nature, that covers the earth with verdure, makes trees and plants push out their leaves with renewed vigour as the season of every year returns, we should say that it is God who does this—that it is the power of God which causes these effects; for if the word Nature, in these expressions, does not mean God himself, what does it mean? What other different sense can be given it, to be intelligible? To say that God does one thing or causes another, is speaking what we can understand; because God is an actual efficient being. There is a real agent for the operation, a real cause for a real effect. But when we talk of *nature* as the cause or doer of any thing, when, in truth, there is no such being as nature at all, distinct and separate from God himself, it is to set up a new word or name, or at least a mere imaginary existence, as the actual worker and performer of natural productions. In some other expressions, the absurdity, when the expressions come to be examined, is more flagrant. By way of accounting for any beautiful or curious appearance, which we observe amongst the varieties with which the earth is covered, we say it is the nature of the plant, or the nature of the soil? What nature? The nature of the plant. What is this? If it stands for any thing, it stands for the law, and order, and power of God, according to which he carries

on the increase and restitution of the plant: so that we should in truth and propriety say, when we would give a reason (if it can be called a reason) for the curious construction and beautiful formation of a plant or animal, instead of saying it belongs to the nature of such a plant or animal, that it is the method in which God has contrived, and according to which he made and still preserves it. Nature is nothing—is no real being—has no reality or existence. It is God who is all in all. The word nature, when we use it, unless it means the power of God, means nothing. We should therefore accustom ourselves to say nothing but what is the plain truth, that God does make or produce all things, instead of saying that nature does either the one or the other. Or if we conform to customary and established ways of speaking, we should carefully bear in mind that what we call nature is in truth God—that it is he whom we mean—that he alone is the agent in all these things—and that nature is only the method by which he chooses to act and operate amongst us.

But, lastly, another circumstance, which takes off our attention from the works of God, is their regularity. All these, we see, proceed in a regular manner: day and night succeed one another—the sun rises and sets at its own stated time and place—the sea ebbs and flows as it has done before—the seasons, and the changes which belong to them, come round in their stated order; this, I say, takes off the mind from remarking that they are effected at all, or that there must be necessarily some great being at work to bring them to pass. Should we see a miracle, the sun, for instance, to stand still, or the tide cease to flow, we should not doubt but that there was a power and cause from which to produce it; but it does not strike us,

what yet is very certain, that there is an equal necessity for a power and a cause for carrying on the course of things. "Since the fathers fell asleep, all things (we are apt, as Saint Peter observes, to say) continue the same from the beginning of the world;" but does this less prove the hand of a master, because they go on truly and exactly? Because God is pleased, in his general operations, to act regularly, shall we think that he does not act at all? especially when that very regularity is one great perfection of his works. How would husbandry be carried on, if the seasons were not regular, and to be depended upon beforehand? How could the navigation of the sea be managed if its tides were not constant? This circumstance shows, therefore, infinite wisdom; but it does not show the less power, or any less certainty of that power having been exerted. Without a cause, without a contriver, without a maker, without a power to produce these things, they could no more come to pass regularly than they could irregularly. The sun could no more rise or set in a certain course than in an uncertain one.

To sum up the whole. There cannot be a more sure proof that a house must have had a builder, or a watch a maker, than there is that the world had a Creator; and this proof is neither more nor less valid, because that Creator, like many of the great powers of the universe, of whose existence we are nevertheless convinced, is invisible to our eyes; nor yet because we have fallen into a way of attributing things to nature which, at the best, means nothing, instead of regarding things as the operations of God; nor, lastly, because the general works of the Deity, instead of surprising us by strange and unnatural appearances, for the most part proceed in a constant and regular order.

XXXIV.

UNITY OF GOD.

MARK XII. 29.

Hear, O Israel! the Lord our God is one Lord.

WE have been so much accustomed to think and speak of one God, as the maker and governor of the universe, and to hear all use the same language, and express the same persuasion about the matter, that we are not easily brought to suspect that the notions of mankind upon the subject were ever different from what they are: whereas in truth, before the reception of Christianity in the world, the people of almost every country, the Jews excepted, maintained that there existed a great number and variety of gods, dwelling together in heaven, and governing the world amongst them; endowed with different powers and dispositions; exercising different offices, and presiding over different events; sometimes carrying on the affairs of the universe, as it were, in conjunction, and sometimes striving and contending with one another about them. This was the ancient belief of a great part of the world; and although many are now brought to the same opinion upon the subject, namely—that there is one, and only one God in the universe—yet the case we find was not always so.

In pursuing this subject, of what is called the unity of God, I shall first lay before you the ground of our assurance that there is one only God, the author and

cause of all things; and then I shall add some reflections upon the doctrine of one God, as applicable to the Jewish and Christian dispensations. Now the argument which proves that there is but one Creator, is the uniformity of council and design observable in the creation; by which is meant this—that in every part of the world that we are acquainted with, the same laws and constitution of nature obtains, and that one part is subservient and essential to another part, so as to form together one plan, scheme, and system: and if it appears that one plan, scheme, and system runs through the whole of the creation, it affords clear and certain inference that the whole is the conception, contrivance, and design of one being—for had different beings formed different parts of the universe, we should undoubtedly have seen throughout different parts different laws of nature, a different order of things, never perhaps independent of one another, which is not by any means the fact. Take, for instance, our globe, the earth on which we tread, and compare the different regions of it with one another. A stone falls to the ground in China just as it does in England; water runs to a level in both. The same sun rises and sets in the most distant region of the globe as here; a grain of wheat springs up in the same manner in one quarter of the globe that it does in another; a bird builds its nest in the same way in whatever country it is found. The same laws of nature hold in all. In general, the very same species of plants and animals are to be met with in the several parts of the globe: men, for instance, inhabit any part. When a new plant or new animal is found, the formation of it bears an evident similitude and analogy to that of the plants and animals with which we are acquainted. Every plant, for instance, has its root, its

fibres, its sap, its flowers, and seed; every animal has much the same senses of sight, touch, taste, hearing, and smelling; every animal is male and female; every animal has blood, and is sustained by food; every one has a heart and lungs, brain and limbs—and this much similar prevails in all creatures: though new creatures be continually discovered, new laws of nature never are. The rain descends, the winds blow, the thunder is heard, the lightning seen; fire and water, earth and air, possess the same powers, hold the same place, produce the same effects, act upon one another in the same manner in the most remote and hidden, the hottest and coldest tracts of the earth, that they do and always have done with us at home. Now what is the plain inference from hence, but that the same being is the author of those effects in all these places; that they have all come from the same hand, have all had one origin, and one Creator? No one can doubt, but that the being who founded and established the laws of nature here was the same being who founded and established the laws of nature in America; because the laws are throughout the same. The Creator, who gave to the sparrow that instinct by which it builds its nest in this country, undoubtedly was he who gave to the bird its instinct in the most distant parts of the earth; because the bird, left to itself, in all countries would build its nest the same. This is only a trifling and particular instance; it is only one example out of many thousands: throughout the whole order and economy of nature, in every part of the world that has been travelled over or found out, there exists a manifest sameness of plan, and scheme, and design. Then, if we ascend from our globe, which undoubtedly owes its formation to one hand, to the globes which occupy the firmament—the sun, moon,

and planets in particular—we find amongst them a relation, a subserviency to one another, which demonstrate that they are different parts of one system. For instance: together with our earth, there revolve round the sun five, or perhaps six, other planets, all receiving light and heat from the sun, in like manner as we do; and so influencing and acting upon our earth, and upon one another, that if it, or any one of them, was destroyed, the motions of all the rest would be so disturbed that they would all fall into ruin and confusion. This shows a system. He that made one made all; for they all mutually depend upon each—the rest could not go on without that one, nor it without them: consequently they were produced together, and produced in pursuance of a common plan; which plan must have existed in the same divine mind, and, as far as the same plan continues, so far we are sure one and the same Creator was concerned. To the very extremest limits to which our knowledge or observation reaches, we find one and the same God; because we find a uniformity of council and design, a connexion of parts, a relation of things one to another, which could not be expected to take place amongst the works and productions of different, independent beings.

And what is a further and undeniable proof that the doctrine of one God is the genuine dictate of reason is, that all the reasoning part of mankind are now agreed upon it. Whatever disputes or differences of opinion there may be among thinking and learned men concerning other points, there is none upon this: which shows, that however erroneous notions had formerly crept in amongst mankind concerning a multitude of gods, the thing itself is sufficiently certain; for as reason and knowledge have made advances and gained ground

in the world, men have gradually come to a pacific agreement about the matter. "The Lord our God is one Lord:" there is none other besides him; one and the same; who made the heavens and the earth, ourselves, all that is around us, all we see, all we know of.

We now proceed to observe from this doctrine, in regard to the two great revelations under which we now live—the Jewish and the Christian, the Old and the New Testaments. Now with regard to the Old Testament, there is this remarkable undisputed fact—that at the time when every other nation and every other religion in the world held that there were many gods, the Jews alone, in the religion of Moses, taught that there was but one: so that upon this, the greatest and most important point in the world—that which is now found out, and allowed, and agreed upon to be the truth, was contained and delivered in the Bible, at a time when no such opinion was to be met with among any other persons, or in any other book; but contrary opinions. How is it to be accounted for, that the people of the Jews should hit upon the truth, when every other nation mistook it; that their nation alone should maintain that there was one, and only one God, who first produced, and still governs all things, when the various nations which surrounded them all fell into an opposite persuasion; that Moses should be the first, and, as far as we find, the *only* person who delivered a doctrine which many ages afterwards, and *not until* many ages afterwards, the whole world, in a manner, was to be convinced was the truth—how, I say, shall we account for this, but by believing, what the Scriptures teach us to believe, that Moses and the fathers of the Jewish nation received it from God; that it was upon self-evidence that God, in the Old Testament,

expressly taught his peculiar people, and enjoined them to maintain it; nay more, this was that great truth which it was the very end and purpose of this institution to keep in the world? For although it may appear to some to be indifferent whether a man hold one God or many; besides that nothing can be *indifferent* which relates to Almighty God, the fact is, and always has been, that the opinion of a diversity of gods leads directly to gross corruption in religion, and, in consequence of this, to gross immoralities in practice: so that the knowledge of the one God, and the preservation of this knowledge, has always been essential to the preservation of virtue. In the Old Testament it was preserved, when it was nowhere else to be found. By the Jewish account it was not only preserved, but on many occasions communicated to the rest of the world; for as many countries as at any time became acquainted with this wonderful history, and with it their law, learned from it that the gods of the heathens were nothing—that in truth, there was but one God, and he the God of Israel.

But next and lastly, it comes to be considered how the matter stands in the New Testament, in the Christian dispensation, under which we live now. I say, that the Christian dispensation entirely confirms and repeats what the Jewish Scripture of the Old Testament had before delivered: "Hear, O Israel!" saith our Saviour himself, "the Lord our God is one Lord." "We know," saith Saint Paul to the Corinthians, "that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one; that, though there be many that are called gods in heaven and in earth, to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and one Lord Jesus Christ." And again: "There is one God

and Father of us all, who is above all, and in you all." These passages are very clear and express, and can never be mistaken, to us Christians; that is, "There is one God, blessed for evermore." We hear, nevertheless, of three divine persons—we speak of the Trinity. We read of the "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." Now concerning these, it is to be observed, that they must all be understood in such a manner as to be consistent with the above positive declarations, that there is "one only supreme God." What is that union which subsists in the divine nature; of what kind is that relation by which the divine persons of the Trinity are connected, we know little—perhaps it is not possible that we should know more: but this we seem to know, first, that neither man nor angel bears the same relation to God the Father as that which is attributed to his only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ; and secondly, that very thing does not break in upon the fundamental truth of religion, that there is "one only supreme God," who reigneth and dwelleth in heaven and on earth; who is All in All, the same Spirit always, unchangeable; "who only hath immortality—dwelling in light which cannot be approached; whom no man hath seen, nor can see; to whom be glory and dominion for ever. Amen."

XXXV.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD PROVED FROM THE LIGHT OF NATURE AND REVELATION.

(PART I.)

PSALM XXXIII. 5.

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

OF all the great and glorious attributes of the being whom we worship, whose we are, and on whom we depend, none is so endearing or so important to us as his goodness; that magnificent power which laid the foundation of the earth, which spread abroad the heavens as a curtain, which assigned for the sea its channels and its bounds, saying it should not pass them; who hath brought into being ten thousand worlds like our own, rolling in the firmament, all of which are put in motion and sustained in their orbs by his Almighty hand; that consummate wisdom which created universal nature, which drew such regularity as this out of chaos and confusion; which contrives, with such exquisite skill, the largest as well as the least part of creation, from globes of immeasurable magnitude down to the limbs of insects too small for our eyes to perceive.

Although such are a just and never-to-be-exhausted subject of astonishment and adoration, yet neither of them is of that immediate concern and consequence to ourselves as the benevolence, and kindness, and good-

ness of his disposition; because, if we ever find that these illustrious qualities are under the direction of a good and gracious will, then, but not till then, they become a solid ground of love, and confidence, and resignation to all who are to depend upon them besides. If God be not good, what reason have we to believe that by doing good we please him? So that the subject of the divine goodness lies at the root of all morality and religion—of all our rules of conduct, and all our hopes of happiness. Now no man hath seen God at any time; we can know him only by his works and his word: his works are to be taken into consideration, both from this being the natural order, and because it is from his works we collect that his word is to be relied upon. We will therefore state, as briefly as we can, the argument by which is made out the divine goodness and benevolence to his creatures: for the main thing wanted, in an argument of this sort, is, that it be short and intelligible, that every one may retain and revert to it in his own thoughts. When God created the human species, either he wished their happiness, or he wished their misery, or he was indifferent and unconcerned about either: no other supposition is to be made. If he had wished our misery, he might have made sure of his purpose by framing our senses to be so many sores and pains to us, as they are now instruments of gratification and enjoyment, or by placing us amidst objects as ill suited to our perceptions as to have continually offended us, instead of ministering to our refreshment and delight. He might, for example, if he had pleased, have made every thing we tasted bitter, every thing we saw loathsome, every thing we touched a sting, every smell a stench, and every sound a discord.

If he had been indifferent about our happiness or

misery, we must impute to our good fortunes (as all design by this supposition is excluded), both the capacity of our senses to receive pleasure, and the supply of external objects fitted to excite it; but either of these, and still more both of them, being too much to be attributed to accident, nothing is left for it but the first supposition, that God, when he created the human species, wished their happiness, and made for them the provision he has made, with that view and for that purpose.

This is the argument in brief; but it deserves to be displayed somewhat more at large; for, I trust, the more it is considered, the more satisfactory it will be found. The world about us was certainly made, and made by God; and there are three suppositions, and only three possible suppositions, as to the disposition and design with which he made it—either from a delight in the misery and torment of his creatures, or with a total unconcern what became of them one way or the other, or with the good and gracious will and wish that they should enjoy and be happy in the existence which he was giving them. If these are the only three possible suppositions, and the first two can be made out incredible, it will follow that the third is the true one. Now the supposition of a malicious purpose, like what we sometimes hear of in eastern tyrants, a pleasure in the sufferings of others, may, without any conceivable end and advantage to be answered to themselves, though it be possible he can do such a thing, is actual mischief—is the perverseness and corruption of the human heart. Yet it is absolutely excluded from being the case here; because the same power which framed and contrived our several faculties, and made us susceptible of so many pleasures, and placed so

many pleasing objects within our reach, could, if he had been so minded, have converted any one of these into instruments of torment and disgust. The power cannot be questioned, because he who could do one could do the other—he who could make a creature happy, or capable of happiness, could make it miserable and destined to inevitable misery. The first supposition, therefore, I think, is clearly out of the question. Some may think that there is more probability in the second, namely, that our Creator was unconcerned and indifferent about either our happiness or misery. I believe, upon inquiry, it will be found that there is not much more likelihood in this than in the other; for suppose the divine Being to have had no regard, or affection, or solicitude for the happiness of the creatures he was producing, there was nothing but chance for it, or good fortune as I may say, that we are so well as we are; for, as to design in our favour, you say there was none. Now reflect for a moment how the chances stand: what likelihood was there that such an organ as the eye, for instance, fitted and contrived for so many valuable purposes both of convenience and pleasure, should have been the effect of chance? That is, can we imagine that the Author of all things, when he planned and fabricated the useful and exquisite mechanism of this precious sense, did not foresee and contemplate the uses it was to serve, and did not mean and intend that the creature to whom he gave it should receive happiness and enjoyment from it? Was there but this instance in the world, it would be sufficient to confute the notion that God meant and intended nothing about our happiness and enjoyment at all. But the eye is but one sense of five—seeing is but one faculty out of many: our hearing, speech, hands, feet,

together with the several endowments of our minds and understandings, all admit of the same observation. If this alone was so small that we could accidentally receive one such important faculty, how out of all proportion and calculation is it, that we should thus find ourselves in possession of so many? Nor is this all. Suppose we had the several senses, still they had stood us in little stead, if we had not been placed amidst objects precisely suited to them; our eyesight, for instance, might as well have been denied us, if the objects which constantly surround us had been too great or too small, too near or too distant to be perceived—our taste and smell had better have been out of the composition, if the meats that had generally been presented to the one had been nauseous or insipid, and the odours which exhaled from objects had continually offended us. It is only particular things that can, from their nature, please and gratify our senses; and out of the infinite variety which the capacity of nature allowed us, how extraordinary is it (suppose intention and design to have us happy to be laid out of the case), that the particular things should have been created, and still more that we should find ourselves in the midst of them. These instances appertain to the human species, because it is the disposition of the Deity towards his rational creatures which we are inquiring after, and precisely concerned in: but all nature speaks the same language. Every animal may, to the lowest reptile, possess some faculty or other, some means of gratification, which would not have been given it by a malevolent being, who delighted in misery, and which it would not have received without a degree of good fortune, of which we see no example, from a being who produced it without any concern about its happiness or misery at

all. By the goodness of God, we see his kindness to his creatures; and as the world, which we see now, could not have been constituted at first, either with an evil design, or without design at all, what other conclusion is left, but that our Creator intended and wished our happiness when he made us; and that the same will and wish continue, so long as the same creation and order of things is upheld by him; for any change in his councils and character, were it possible, would be immediately followed by a corresponding alteration in the laws and order of nature.

But after all is said, evil, and pain, and misery exist among us still; diseases, and sickness, and maladies, and misfortunes, are not done away by reasoning about them, or by any opinion we entertain of the divine goodness: how are these to be reconciled with the beneficence which we attribute to the divine character? Now I think there is one observation which will go a great way to take off the edge of the objection, namely, that evil is never the object of contrivance. We can never trace out a train of contrivances to bring about an evil purpose. The world abounds with contrivances of nature; and all the contrivances, we are acquainted with, will conduce to beneficial purposes. As this is a distinction of great consequence, I will endeavour to illustrate it.

If you had occasion to describe the instruments of husbandry, you would hardly say, this is to cut or wound the labourer's hand, this to bruise his limbs, this to break his bones; though, from the construction of several implements of husbandry, and the manner of using them, these misfortunes commonly happen: the mischief that it does, however, is not the object of the contrivance. Whereas, if it was necessary to describe

engines of torture, you would say of one, this is to extend the sinews, this to dislocate the joints, this to search the flesh. Here pain and misery is the very object of the contrivance, which is a different case from the former one, though the same result may actually follow it. Now nothing of this kind is to be found in the works of nature—nothing where there appears contrivance to bring about mischief. Of the beneficial faculties, the contrivance is often evident. Ask after our eyesight, the anatomist will show you the structure of the eye, its coats, humours, nerves, and muscles, all fabricated and put together for the purpose of vision, as plainly as a telescope or microscope for assisting it, and in the very same way. Ask after the hearing, the same skill will teach you how sound is propagated through the air, how the outward ear collects it, how the drum of the ear receives the stroke, how the auditory passage carries it to the brain. There can be no doubt either of the contrivance or object of it. The same of our smelling, tasting, speech, hands and feet, and all our beneficial faculties. But now ask after any disease, or pain, or infirmity, and I defy any man to show you the train of contrivance to bring about, or contribute to that end. Ask after the gout, the stone; no anatomy could ever show you a system of vessels or organization calculated to produce these. Can any say, this gland is to secrete the humour which forms the gout?—this bag is to contain, this duct is to convey and disperse it round the body? And the like holds of any maladies of the human body. Teeth are contrived to eat, not to ache: their aching may be incidental to the contrivance, perhaps inseparable from it; or let it be called a defect in the contrivance, it is not the object of it. And this observation extends to many

evils which are beside our subject: it is true of earthquakes, volcanos; they all show the effect of a visible train of contrivances. Now contrivance proves design, and the predominant tendency of the contrivance indicates the disposition of the designer. The disposition of the designer is to be judged of, not from the accidental effects of the contrivance, not from the inseparable consequences of the contrivance, nor from any other defect where it may be supposed liable to any, but from the end, aim, and object of the contrivance, which, in the works of nature, or, in other words, in the works of God, are always beneficial.

What I would add, by way of a concluding remark, is this: that if there be other evils, which do not fall within the above observation, if there be the unmerited misery of the good and pious, and the still more unaccountable prosperity of the wicked, is it not more than probable that there will come a time when God will, as he certainly can, rectify the irregularity? Are not the thousand and ten thousand proofs of bounty and benevolence, which we see about us, enough to found a persuasion that the few examples which seem of a contrary cast will hereafter be cleared up, and contemplated so as to reduce the whole to one entire and uniform plan of love, and kindness, and good-will, to the work of his Almighty hand?

XXXVI.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

(PART II.)

PSALM XXXIII. 5.

The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

HAVING explained the argument by which the goodness of our Almighty Governor is proved from the light of nature; or, in other words, from those specimens of his intentions which we are able to observe, connect, and comprehend, in the world around us; I shall now proceed to state some of the many declarations of Revelation, in which the same divine attributes, though under various forms, names, and modifications, are repeated and described:—and these are material to be known and stated; for whatever intimation and reasonable evidence of God's goodness the order of the universe may furnish to a contemplative mind, it must be acknowledged that pointed proofs of the same kind are to found in the revealed word of God; and the fidelity and certainty of that word is, in return, also proved by the light of nature; for it is not conceivable, nor contended indeed by any, that a being who, in such remarkable instances, had testified his love to his rational creatures, and care for their happiness, should go about, by mysterious attempts, to mislead and deceive them in accounts of that which most nearly con-

cerns them, and in which it is impossible for them to detect the deceit.

Now the divine goodness, as it is excited towards the human species, parts itself into six great branches—justice, bounty, fidelity, patience, placability, mercy; these all spring from the same root, the divine desire and provision for the happiness of his creatures; in other words, the love of God. We will now see what the Scriptures have to tell us of each of them.

The justice of the deity is the foundation of all religion; yet this was a point in which the apprehensions of many in ancient times laboured under some uncertainty; many of the vulgar, and some of the wise men, conceived of the deity as not regulating the treatment of his creatures by any steady rules of justice, but as bestowing his favours capriciously, and actuated entirely by partial affections, such as we feel and conceive towards one another. The Scriptures, however, of the Old Testament strenuously combat this error, and describe him as a God of perfect righteousness, equity, and justice. The song of Moses, as recorded in the 32d chapter of Deuteronomy, and which some men have called the dying words of that illustrious lawgiver, begins with the subject: "I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgement: a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and righteous is he." The book of Job was written expressly to vindicate the justice of God in those trying circumstances in which the impatience and infirmity of human nature is most apt to question it—in the calamity and affliction with which he is pleased to visit us. Certain expressions of that book are full to our purpose: "For be it from God that he should do wickedness,

and from the Almighty that he should commit iniquity; for the works of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgement."

"Justice and judgement," saith David, "are the habitation of thy throne." The Jews had been led to suspect what may be called the personal justice of God, in that he visited upon the children the iniquity of the fathers, or as the proverb expresses it: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." The prophet Ezekiel, in the 18th chapter of that book, is authorized in the name of Almighty God so far to repel the charges, as to show that the final destiny, the ultimate happiness or misery, of each individual was to depend upon his own conduct and behaviour, and nothing else: "Behold, all souls are mine—as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine; the soul that sinneth, it shall die. Yet, saith the house of Israel, the ways of the Lord are unequal. Are not my ways equal, are not your ways unequal?"

The New Testament I shall quote for the two fundamental articles of divine justice—the future punishment of vice without respect of persons or station, and the future reward of virtue. "Thou treasurest up wrath," saith Saint Paul, "against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgement of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds—to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and who do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul that

doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, and honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile; for there is no respect of persons with God." Again, in another place, "God is not unrighteous, to forget your work and labour of love which ye have shown." These are satisfactory accounts of the divine justice: and it may be observed, that there is no foundation, in these accounts, for the opinion that justice is one thing in God, and another thing in man; and though we understand what justice means between man and man, we can argue nothing from that concerning the divine justice. This may be exceedingly different, though the expression describes the same quality in God, which we call justice in man; for suppose you were describing a just judge, or a just king, what else would you say of him, but that he rendered to every man according to his labour; that he forgot no man's work and labour; that he conferred glory, honour, and peace upon them that did good, tribulation and anguish upon them that worked evil, and this without respect or distinction of persons. This is the way you would describe justice in a man, and this is what the Scripture says of God.

Next to the justice of God is his bounty, which is ascending one degree higher in the scale of goodness; for it is possible to be strictly just without generosity; and generosity built upon justice is an advance in moral excellence. But here I admit that it is not in the word of God we are disposed to seek for evidence of the divine bounty; for no assurance, from however high authority, can persuade us that God is bountiful to his creatures, till we actually realize and feel this bounty: nor need we look far; our bodies, our limbs

and senses, our reason and faculties, the field, the air, the ocean, every flower, every animal; the lilies clothed with his vesture, the young raven fed by his hand, the young of every animal delighted with its existence, sporting amidst the gratification which God has provided for them all; provided by his power, contrived by his wisdom, fostered by his continual protection; such unmerited and unasked-for instances of beautiful intention require no additional amplification or authority from Scripture. The Scriptures, however, though they cannot add to the evidence of nature, agree with it. He is there a God abundant in goodness, of great kindness, who will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly, who exerciseth loving-kindness in the earth, who giveth unto all men liberally, and upbraideth not. One great addition, indeed, the Scriptures make to the appearance of nature; one instance they unfold of divine bounty; one gift they tell us of which nature knows not: "in that he gave his only begotten Son, to the end that all who believe in him should have everlasting life;" upon which Saint Paul remarks very reasonably and justly, that "if he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not also freely give us all things?" Another mark of the divine goodness, of infinite importance to us, is the divine fidelity in performing his promises, and bringing about what he has declared and threatened. This is a branch of benevolence, for true benevolence will not deceive. The divine constancy and veracity is finely expressed in that exclamation of the prophet Balaam: "God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it; or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Moses was careful to represent

the God of Israel to that people, as a being in whose truth and faith they might implicitly depend: "Know, therefore, that the Lord thy God he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him." This was before they entered into the land of Canaan, and the arduous undertaking of subduing the inhabitants. Afterwards, when that business was accomplished, by a train of surprising miracles and assistances, Joshua, in his exhortation before his death, reminds them how signally and circumstantially the word of God had been fulfilled, and his truth maintained through all the awful scenes to which they had been witnesses: "You know in all your hearts, and in all your souls, that not any thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God hath spoken among you; all things are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed." "A God of truth," "a God of faithfulness," are titles perpetually ascribed to the deity in the psalms and prophets: "He will ever be mindful of his covenant;" "he will not suffer his faithfulness to fail, and his truth endureth to all generations." The New Testament speaks in the same strain, with this difference, that it applies the faithfulness of God to our spiritual concerns; whereas the Old Testament has chiefly natural and temporal blessings and curses in view. "God is faithful, by whom you were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord—God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able." But above all, that divine consolation to all whose sufferings and needs tempt them to mistrust God: "Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls unto him as unto a willing and faithful creator."

Another quality of the divine goodness to which the best are indebted, and by which alone the bad are permitted to continue in existence, is his patience and long-suffering. In that awful conference upon the Mount Sinai, between the Lord and Moses, when the commandments were delivered, God is pleased to introduce himself with a description of his own nature, which comprises this and many of the particulars we are now explaining: "And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed: The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." "Thou, O Lord," says the holy David, "art a God full of compassion and gracious—long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth." After the building of the second temple, in the time of Zechariah, the nation of the Jews made solemn confession and thanksgiving to Almighty God, in which they acknowledged, as well they might, his exceeding bounty, forbearance, and long-suffering with that people. "Our fathers," say they, "dealt proudly, and hardened themselves, and hearkened not to thy commandments; but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsakedst them not." But is he a God of the Jews only? are not all mankind the objects of his charity? The Lord is long-suffering towards all; namely, to all his human creatures, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Again; "Despisest thou," says Saint Paul to the impenitent Jews, "the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering?"

Another propitious circumstance in the divine goodness is his placability and readiness to forgive the offences

which are committed against him; but this must always be considered as subject to one condition, the repentance of the offender; for otherwise this attribute would undo and defeat all the rest; for a perfect facility of unconditional forgiveness would prove such an excuse for great wickedness, as would fill the world with misery and disorder. But placability, such as is consistent with the order of a moral governor studious for the happiness of the whole, is ascribed to God in both Testaments. It was not unknown to the Old, and the New is full of it; the 18th chapter of Ezekiel is direct as to the first: "If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die; all his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him—in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure that the wicked should die, saith the Lord God, and not that he should return from his ways and live?" The New Testament is full of it: Christ came to preach repentance and remission of sins, to seek and to save that which was lost—his baptism was the baptism of repentance—the great offer that both Christ and his apostles held out to the converts was forgiveness of the sins which were past, and faith and amendment. The 5th chapter of Saint Luke sets forth the complacency with which God receives returning sinners in a variety of forms; it is with the satisfaction with which a father receives a miserable and repenting child—"Verily I say unto you, there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth."

The last branch of divine goodness we consider is his mercy—mercy, in the common and general sense of the text, comprehends all those benevolent qualities

which we have noticed. It is another name for his goodness. But there is one particular instance and exercise of mercy which is all I need name; and this is his tenderness and compassion to our infirmities, and the disadvantages of our state and condition: "Like as a father pitieth his own children," saith the psalmist, "so the Lord pitieth them that fear him; for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are but dust." Saint Paul, in the 2d chapter of the Ephesians, describes the future condition, both of himself, and of those whom he wrote to before their call and conversion to Christianity. "Among whom we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; but God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ."

Upon the whole, therefore, here is Almighty God described in the words which he himself, and his holy Spirit, dictate and authorise. He is described as supremely good; and if any one asks what his goodness consists in, we answer that the Scripture teaches us to place it in justice to his rational creatures, in dealing with every one according to his deserts, punishing the impenitent and unrighteous, remembering and rewarding our works and labours of love—in loving the whole creation (for, throughout the whole world, there is not a corner in which some instance of kind contrivance and provision for their happiness is not found)—in fidelity to his word, his promises and threats—in patience and long-suffering with our sins and provocation—in placability, or a disposition to pardon, whenever pardon is consistent with the end and support of his

moral government; and lastly, in compassion and mercy to our infirmities and feelings, in condescension to the difficulties and defects under which we labour—in accepting and remembering our struggles with temptation, our feeble endeavours, if they are sincere, after amendment—our progress, though but very imperfect, in obedience and reformation.

XXXVII.

THE ILLS OF LIFE DO NOT CONTRADICT THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

ROM. x. 28.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.

A CHILD, if it reflect, will often be at a loss to account for the behaviour of its parents towards it; and a peevish and perverse child will often murmur and complain; yet the same child, when it becomes a man, and looks back upon its youth and infancy, will see nothing in its parents' treatment of it but the greatest prudence and affection—will then discover the reason and the justice of what it once complained of, and discern the end and meaning of many things which at that time appeared so intricate and unaccountable. This hereafter may be our case, and probably will be so. We must wait for the great day of Christ's coming again, for the further enlargement of our understandings and more perfect comprehension of these subjects. In the mean time, nevertheless, many considerations which may conduce to set us at ease, and inspire us with trust and confidence in God's providence and goodness, are fit to be known and attended to. To proceed, therefore: many of the complaints which we make against Providence are of such a nature as, one may say, can never be satisfied, and are therefore manifestly unreasonable;

as, for instance, when we complain of the want of greater strength than we have, or of superior knowledge, or longer life, or immortality, or that we cannot move ourselves with greater speed, or get through our work in less time or with less trouble—what is this but, in other words, to wish that we had been created angels; which is all one as if a brute, a horse, for instance, or a dog, should murmur that it was not born a man. The absurdity of this we see immediately. In like manner, a superior being, or an angel, might as well complain that it was not formed an archangel; and the archangel itself would have the same reason to complain that it was inferior to the supreme Being who made it. Now all these complaints are of a kind, as I said before, never to be satisfied: for so long as there is any thing above us, which there always must be; any perfection we do not possess—any, however, that we can form a notion of—there would be the same reason for these complaints. Suppose a brute to complain that it has not the faculties or reason of a man—in other words, that it is not a man: suppose its own complaint gratified, suppose it to succeed, and the brute to become a man—would it cease to complain? might it not still answer that it was without the properties and perfections of an angel?—at least, it would have the same reason for its murmuring that we have. The evils then, complained of, are called by divines the evils of imperfection; and it is agreed, I think, by all, that they are to be laid out of the case, as conveying no possible imputation upon the divine wisdom or goodness: for a complaint which cannot be satisfied, and which you must go on for ever with, must evidently be groundless and unreasonable in its principle. So then, the defects and imperfections of our nature are what Providence, so far as

we can judge, must permit, and should never be repined at, nor any of the consequences of them; which will take in a great part of our complaints, for many of them may be traced up to this.

The next consideration I shall propose, which makes a very material part of the subject, is this—that God thinks fit, and very wisely too, as we can in some measure understand, to govern the world by general rules and laws, which however, like all general rules, must sometimes press hard upon individuals, and produce particular inconveniences. I will explain, as well as I can, what I mean by these general rules. There are, first, what we call laws of nature, which are in general observed to take place without interruption or regard to each particular effect that they may produce. Thus, by the law of nature, the sun rises and shines, though he shine perhaps on the fields of the wicked as well as the good. By the same law, a certain state of the air, which also is brought on by other regular causes, produces rain; rain, when it falls, swells the rivers; the rivers, when they swell, may overflow and damage or lay waste the neighbouring fields; and this falls equally on the virtuous and the sinner. All this comes to pass in consequence of the regular course of nature being suffered to take place; and God does not see fit to interrupt or suspend this course for the particular prejudice that it may occasion to individuals. In like manner, the tide ebbs and flows according to the constant order of its nature, though it may thereby obstruct, it may happen, the ships of the good and virtuous merchant, or carry safe into port the wealth and property of those who little deserve it. We perceive then reason in such things as are constant and regular; as the flowing of the tides, the return of the seasons, and the

like; but do not see resemblances of it in the more varied parts of nature, as winds and storms, hail and thunder and lightning; though there is the same reason for it, because these as much depend upon their causes, and are as much governed by a law, though unknown to us, as the other. Now although great particular inconveniences may sometimes arise from these general laws of nature, yet I think it will be found to be for the common benefit of the world that they should be permitted to prevail; and for this reason amongst others, that it is upon their prevailing, that is, upon the course of nature going regularly on, that all the foresight we have, of future events depends. We act, and determine, we prepare, we provide, in the expectation of those laws of nature going on as they have done; nor is it conceivable how we could act, prepare, or provide, if it was otherwise. How would the mariner, for instance, order his navigation, or settle his voyage, if the flowing of the tide or blowing of the wind was to depend upon the convenience of the good and virtuous? How would the husbandman sow or plough either in hope or safety, if the rain must fall and sun shine only when it suited the grounds of the righteous and good? It is easy to imagine what confusion must arise from so much irregularity and uncertainty. It is evidently to the advantage of the whole, that such a general order of things should be appointed and maintained in the world—that in what concerns our conduct and subsistence, we may look forward to, and form a judgement of, futurity. Though here we must speak with caution—we intend not to say but that God can control and suspend the ordinary course of nature, direct the winds and storms, give or withhold the rain when he pleases, and as he pleases; nor do we dispute but that he often does so—

sometimes openly, oftener when we do not know it. We may say, that he has appointed general rules and regular courses of things, and permits it to a certain degree, so as to answer some beneficial purpose at least; thus enabling us to form a judgement of the future. There may be other, and perhaps stronger, reasons for God's adhering, if we may say so, to general rules; and who can say how far general rules extend? May we not refer to them, for example, diseases of body and weakness of mind? for these have their causes, and follow their causes as much as the tide does the moon. God can, no doubt, remove these causes, or hinder them from operating; but it is by the same power that he can hinder the tide from flowing, or the moon from drawing it: a power which, in this latter instance, we do not expect he should exert often, nor perhaps without good cause, in either case. Upon the whole, even a single person—one out of many millions—an atom, compared with the universe—can he wonder that he should be suffered to labour under difficulties and inconveniences, rather than break in upon those general rules, upon the operation of which the happiness of the rest, of the whole, may in a great degree depend? Thus it appears to be in the natural world: and the same respect to regularity in the effects and consequences of things may hold probably in the moral world; that is, the actions and behaviour of men to one another. Thus one man, by luxury or extravagance, reduces himself to beggary; his poverty involves others in distress who are connected with him; and yet it is still both fitting and necessary that luxury and extravagance should be followed by poverty, and that there should subsist those intercourses and communications between one man and another that make their fortunes dependent upon one

another. This is the natural constitution of the world; and is not to be departed from, because it will now and then produce inconveniences to those who do not deserve to suffer them. In short, what we call the course of nature, that is, the ordinary train of cause and effect, is all we have to direct us in the conduct of life; and though the upholding it often presses hard upon innocent individuals, yet it is necessary for the good of the whole, and therefore perfectly consistent with divine wisdom and goodness, that it should, *in general*, however, be maintained and upheld.

But thirdly: part of our difficulties are owing to this —to our expecting too much; more than we have any reason or authority to expect.

If we find in ourselves any merit or virtue more than in others, we instantly count upon being rewarded by Providence with riches, and grandeur, and honour, and high station. Now this is nowhere promised. Our Saviour indeed says, "If ye seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, these things shall be added unto you." But what things? Not wealth, or power, or advancement, or such like, but food and raiment; what Christ had been speaking of, and "what your Father," he says, "knoweth that you have need of." The Scripture nowhere bids us look for such things as riches or honours, or to pray for them. We are directed to the right use of them, when we have them, and to moderation in the pursuit of them; and that is all that is said about them. Certainly those received them not who were most in God's favour—the apostles and true followers of Jesus Christ—but quite the contrary. The truth is, the Scriptures seem to consider them as hardly of any account or importance; hardly deserving attention, in comparison with the great and glorious ob-

jects it sets before us. Or the case may have been this: riches, and grandeur, &c. may be a blessing or a curse, and are as often one as the other; therefore for the Scriptures to have proposed them absolutely as either would not have been just or proper. The established course of the world, and the overruling hand of Providence, are both, we trust, in favour of the virtuous and good; but neither seems to promise or even permit that riches and honour should always be their portion. Riches, for example, are generally the earnings of industry, activity, or ingenuity; and should be so: for how else should there be any encouragement for these qualities? Who, if it were not so, would be industrious, active, or ingenious?—thus the world, and the business of it, might stand still. But though industry, activity, and ingenuity are sometimes accompanied with virtue, and sometimes not, the persons who possess these qualities will obtain (and from what has been said, it seems proper they should do so), those worldly advantages which the good and pious would engross to themselves.

But fourthly and lastly: a principal key to this subject of providence, and the difficulties we are under about it, is contained, in my opinion, in the words of the text, which you will now observe. "We know," says Saint Paul, "that all things work together for good to them that love God;" which I understand to be indirectly telling us, that even the best of us are not to look for each event separately and singly considered, being either pleasant or useful to us; but that, be they what they will in themselves, or for the present, they will work together for good; they will so fall in with, and qualify one another, as that together the amount and issue of them at last will promote our happiness and interest.

This, in the nature of things, is just as possible as that a bitter medicine should mend our health, or a severe discipline or tedious education should be upon the whole beneficial or even necessary. So that it is possible enough, and Saint Paul, you hear, speaks confidently, that it would be so: "We know," says he, "that all things work together for good."

Thus it was of old with the good and virtuous. They were taught to expect and endure the chastisement of the Lord; for, "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth;" and consequently for their good and happiness at last. They suffered afflictions—many that we should think grievous—but what then? "Their light afflictions, which were but for a moment, worked a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Such is the sound and solid consolation the Holy Scriptures administer.

Now what is the conclusion from all these things? The works of God prove his kindness as demonstrably as his word assures us of his care and protection. Difficulties and disorders in the world there are; but they do not, when thoroughly considered, at all contradict these arguments and assurances: so that they should not shake either our hope or our trust in him.

XXXVIII.

PROPHECIES.

(PART I.)

ACTS XXVIII. 23.

And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God; persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.

THERE is one proof of Christianity as strong now as it ever was, and which may be made in a good degree intelligible to every capacity—I mean the proof from prophecy. Now, therefore, that we are assembled to commemorate the coming of Jesus Christ into the world, I know not how to engage your attention better than by laying before you, and explaining, some of the principal places of the Old Testament where that event is foretold, that you may be able to give one reason, at least, of the faith that is in you, and carry home one considerable argument of the truth and certainty of the religion we profess.

I shall confine myself, as the occasion points out, to the coming of Christ. There are other parts of this evidence, and one in particular, much the most explicit of all; but which, as they relate to the sufferings rather

than the early history of our Saviour, I cannot so properly produce at this time. This I mention, that you may not think that what I now offer contains the whole argument, or the proof complete. I will also omit all such prophecies as are either of a more doubtful application, or more difficult to be interpreted.

Before I proceed to exhibit any particular passages, I must direct your attention to one very essential observation which belongs to them all—which is this; that we are absolutely certain that the prophecies were written many hundred years before the event. I say we are absolutely certain of this, because the prophecies have always been, and are at this day, received and acknowledged by the Jews as genuine parts of the Old Testament. They are found in their bible as well as ours.

The Jews, we all know, are, and ever have been, the declared enemies of Christ and his religion; we may, therefore, be sure they never forge themselves, nor suffer others to foist in their books, any thing that may favour a cause which they so much hated. Had the books of the Old Testament been in the hands of Christians, it might be suspected that they had found means, after the event, to insert into them descriptions that suited with it, in order to impose their prophecies upon the world; but as the case stands, this was morally impossible, for the copies of these books being always in the hands of the Jews, any attempt to corrupt them must have been immediately detected and defeated by their enemies, as evidently, and unexceptionably, as things which come out of the custody of an enemy.

Now this being settled with certainty, viz. that the several places to be quoted by us were actually written

long before the coming of Christ; the only question to be tried, and of which, as hinted above, any plain understanding can judge, is, whether these prophecies, thus compared with the events, do not suit and fall in with them, and prove that they must have been something more than the effect of guess-work. If, when you have the places read to you, and applied to the event, you think the application so distant or obscure, that these things might have happened by accident; then such passages must go for nothing—if, on the contrary, you think there is in any, or all of them put together, more than could reasonably be expected from random conjecture and accidental concurrence; then it will follow, that the persons who delivered these prophecies had some way of knowing they were then operated upon—that is, were imbued and inspired—by the spirit of God; and if it be once allowed that God in any way dictated the prophecies of Christ's coming, the consequence is plain that Christ came from him, and that the religion he established in the world must be true.

In quoting the prophecies, I think it best to pursue the order of time in which they were written. The first, because the most ancient, that I shall mention, is that famous promise which God made to Abraham, in the 22d chapter of Genesis, and the 18th verse: "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Now it has never yet been shown in what manner all the nations of the earth have been blessed in the seed of Abraham, except it be by the means of Jesus Christ, who was one of that seed: the seed of Abraham were the Jews, and few I suppose will allow that the Jews have been a public or universal blessing to nations. Suppose then this prophecy to belong to Jesus Christ, it is true that in him, and consequently in the

seed of Abraham (as he was one of them), all the nations of the earth have been blessed. The blessing of his religion has been held out to most of them. Many have accepted it. The rest, in God's due time, we trust, will. The prophecy speaks thus much, that "in the seed of Abraham," that is, that through some one or other of his posterity, some blessing should be procured in which the rest of mankind, as well as his posterity, might partake. This may be applied with truth to Christ and his religion; and it does not appear to what else it can be applied at all.

The second prophecy I would propose to your consideration is to be found in the 8th chapter of Genesis, and the 10th verse. We have an account in this chapter of Jacob, upon his death-bed, calling his twelve sons about him, and solemnly declaring to each what should befall them, in their respective tribes and families, in future times: when he comes to Judah, he uses these remarkable words, which you are now to take notice of: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." Now in this prophecy three things, I think, are plainly foretold—first, that the sceptre should depart from the other tribes sooner—secondly, that it should remain with the tribe of Judah until Shiloh came—thirdly, that it should then also depart from it. Now apply this prophecy to Christ, and observe how it answers in all these particulars. First, the ten other tribes were extirpated in Assyria nine hundred years before Christ. Secondly, the tribe of Judah continued a nation, and in possession of their own country, till Christ came. Thirdly, they also were then destroyed, and their nation and government were utterly demolished by the Romans. It is

said that the sceptre should not depart from Judah till Shiloh came; from this I infer, that it was to depart from the other tribes sooner, otherwise it would be saying little or nothing to Judah, and this is a promise made to Judah in particular above his other brethren. Now, how did the event answer to this? The event was, that ten out of the twelve tribes, which formed, upon the division, the kingdom of Israel, were carried away captive by the king of Assyria six hundred years before Christ, and were never afterwards heard of; so that the sceptre departed from them in every sense of the expression. The tribe of Benjamin was upon the division so mixed and incorporated with the tribe of Judah, that the one, if I may so say, was lost in the other, and it was afterwards constantly called the land of Judah. The kingdom of Judah returned after the seventy years' captivity into their own land, and continued in possession of their country, of their laws and their religion, till Christ came: as it is evident that the sceptre did not depart from Judah until Shiloh came, so it is in the common use of speech or intimation, that when Shiloh did come it should depart; accordingly, about that time (shortly after Christ's coming, that is, within forty years after his death), the kingdom of Judah also was deprived of its sceptre; that is, underwent a total destruction from the Roman armies:—their city and temple, as we all know, burnt to the ground—their government overthrown—their country laid waste—the people driven out to wander, as they do still, exiles and vagabonds upon the face of the earth. Now there is, as I said before, but one question;—whether this correspondence of the event and the prophecy could, reasonably speaking, be the effect of chance; and how small this chance is you may easily comprehend from hence. Suppose any of

us to undertake to foretell what may be the fate or condition of a particular family a thousand years hence; what little probability is there, that in so wild and wide a field of conjecture we should hit on even a single particular that turned out to be true, much less deliver a prediction, which in all circumstances was fulfilled; nay, which in all its circumstances admitted of a clear and reasonable application: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." I lay no other stress upon the name of Shiloh than just to observe that it must signify a person, and a person of great eminence and importance to the world (or the Jewish nation at least), which Christ undoubtedly was.

The description that is added, "and unto him shall the gathering of the people be," agrees well with the person and character of Christ, who, as the founder of a new religion, did actually gather together unto him an innumerable multitude of all nations and languages, paying adoration to his name, and professing obedience to his authority.

The passage I will next proceed to, omitting, as I said, many that are of a probable, though more obscure application, is the famous one of Isaiah, contained in the 7th chapter, and beginning with the 13th verse. Two neighbouring kings had conspired against Ahaz, king of Judah: the king of Judah and his people being exceedingly alarmed with this confederacy, Isaiah was sent to comfort and encourage them:—before the king, and in the presence, it must be supposed, of a great assembly of the people, Isaiah delivers these solemn words: "Hear ye now, oh house of David, is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give

you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel; butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know" (or till he knows) "to refuse the evil, and choose the good; for before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings." Now that the former part of the prophecy, a virgin conceiving and bearing a son, and that son being called Immanuel, or God with us, is applicable in the strictest sense to Christ, and in the same sense to no other person ever heard of—all see upon the bare reading of it: but there is a difficulty in the latter part of the prophecy which we must endeavour to remove before we can justly lay so great a stress upon it. It is said that "before the child should know how to refuse the evil, and choose the good," that is, before he should come to years of discretion, the land which thou abhorrest, viz. the countries then in confederacy against Ahaz, should be forsaken of both her kings. Now this happened a few years after, so that the child here spoken of could not be Christ, who did not appear till many hundred years after this; and yet the child here spoken of seems, as the prophecy now stands, the same child which the virgin was to bear. This is the difficulty—I will now give you the explanation. In the 3d verse you read that Isaiah, when he was sent upon this message, was commanded to take with him Shear-jashub his son, who was then a little child; this explanation is the key to the whole prophecy, and serves to explain it in this manner: Isaiah, in the presence and audience of the king and people of Judea, who were assembled to receive a message from God, announces this august prediction of the future birth and coming of the Saviour of the world: "The Lord him-

self shall give you a sign—behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel;" which means, as you are told by the prophet, "God with us:" the prophet then adds, "butter and honey shall he eat, till he knows to refuse the evil, and choose the good;" that, although his birth be miraculous, yet shall he be supported by the ordinary means, till he comes to man's estate.

Here ends, as we apprehend it, the prophecy concerning Christ, for the prophet then comes to a new subject; and turning himself to the king in particular, and pointing, we may suppose, at his little son who stood by; "but before," says he, "this child shall know how to refuse the evil and choose the good," that is, before the child standing by you shall attain to years of discretion, "the country which thou abhorrest, the two nations that have conspired thy ruin, shall be forsaken of both its kings:" which, we read, accordingly happened, and within the time limited by the prophecy. The whole passage therefore contains, if we explain it right, two distinct, independent prophecies; the one addressed to the whole nation at large, "hear, O house of David," and relating to the birth and coming of the Messiah, an event of the utmost importance to that whole nation; the other addressed to the king in particular, and relating to the overthrow of the two armies, which then threatened him, and which was to take place in a few years.

Isaiah was introduced to the king and the assembly of Jerusalem, waiting with great expectations for a message from God. This surely was a fit opportunity to announce to this nation the future coming of the promised Messiah, and describes him by a circumstance in which he was distinguished from the whole race of

mankind, "his being born of a virgin." This, therefore, was the first and great prophecy. But as the king Ahaz was then under apprehension from his combined enemies, who threatened him with immediate destruction, the prophet proceeds, before he leaves off speaking, to satisfy him with respect to them; and that the king might take no concern, and set himself at ease with respect to the danger which he dreaded, he assures him that in a very few years—before the child that stood near him came to years of discretion, he should get rid of them both.

There are two circumstances which confirm this interpretation, and so strong, that I cannot forbear mentioning them. Isaiah, as I told you, was commanded to take with him upon this message his young son Shear-jashub. Now this must have been for some purpose; yet unless he was the child meant as coming to man's estate, as we have explained it, it is impossible to say what business he had there, or for what purpose he was commanded to be taken. This is one most striking circumstance: another is this. You read in the next chapter that Isaiah had a son born, and it was solemnly recorded, that before this son could speak, this same event, namely, the destruction of the two kingdoms, should take place. Now the second son coming to his speech, and the first to years of discretion, might very naturally be about the same time; and Isaiah is made to cry out, "behold, I and my children are for signs and for wonders in Israel;" "my children," that is, not only the second child Maher-shalal-hash-baz in the 8th chapter, but his former son Shear-jashub in the prophecy we have been explaining.

If you admit the explanation which thus goes upon so many circumstances of probability, the plain and

[illegible] established, that six hundred years before the birth of Christ, it was foretold that a divine person, Immanuel, God with us, should be born, contrary to the course of nature, of a pure virgin. Is not this what we are told of Christ? is it believed—is it even seriously professed indeed, of any other person in the whole world? Let no one say that he is not qualified to comprehend or judge of the proofs of this. Thanks be to God, who hath given us the sure word of prophecy, which seems to require only a little attention to apprehend it; who hath vouchsafed us such means of conviction, as only ignorance could miss, or what is worse, obstinacy could withstand.

XXXIX.

PROPHECIES.

(PART II.)

ACTS XXVIII. 23.

And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging, to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God; persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.

MANY prophecies of the Old Testament which admit not of so clear, although of a probable, application to the coming of Christ, I take no notice of, notwithstanding it should be observed that these, from the number of them, and taken altogether, constitute a very considerable proof of the truth of our religion: for throughout so large a volume as that of the Old Testament, there might occur here and there an expression which bore by accident an allusion to this great event, or was capable of some figurative application to it; yet that many of them should point the same way, that so great a number should admit of any application at all, can hardly be accounted for without design.

There are also other prophecies which, was I to read them to you, would not appear to you to have that relation to Christ which there is reason to believe they have, and that for want of understanding the style and language of the ancient prophets, which is very singular;

and this is a knowledge not to be expected from the generality of an audience, nor to be taught in the compass of a sermon. Confining myself, therefore, as I proposed, to those prophecies which more apparently respect the coming of Christ, the first which I would offer to your consideration is that noted one of the prophet Micah, to be found in the 5th chapter and 2d verse of this book: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." "Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah:"—The kingdom of Judah was divided into districts, which were called thousands, as certain districts are now-a-days with us called hundreds. Bethlehem was the capital town of one of these districts, though small and inconsiderable, compared with many other capital towns. This is what the prophet means by the expression "though thou be little among the thousands of Judah." These districts were likewise sometimes called principalities; on which account Saint Matthew quotes it thus: "Though thou be little among the princes, or principalities, of Judah," without any alteration in the verses from the words as they are read in the book of Micah itself. But the main thing to be observed is the description that is given of this extraordinary person, and the place he was to come out of—it was he that was to be ruler in Israel. Our Saviour assumed to himself the title and character of king of the Jews; that is, he whom his Father had appointed to give new laws to that nation, and to whose authority many of the Jews did, and all ought to have submitted themselves, "whose goings forth have been of old, and from everlasting." This is a most remarkable

description. Who remembers not what is said of Christ, that "he was in the beginning;" that "before Abraham was, he is; that he came forth from the Father; that he was before all things, the first-born of every creature?" If what is related of Christ be true, he existed with his Father before the foundations of the world: so that in the strictest sense, it might be said that his goings forth were of old, and from everlasting: thus much is certainly true; that Christ laid claim to this character, asserted that he had his existence with God before the creation; nor is there any reason to suppose that he made this claim or assertion in order to bring himself within the scope and description of this prophecy—for this prophecy is never quoted by him or any of his disciples with that view, or for that purpose. There never appeared any other person, either in Bethlehem or any where else, of whom the same things can be said, even if you allow them every thing to which they pretend. No man ever pretended to have his existence with God previous to his being born into the world. Our Lord did; and to his character and pretensions the words of this prophecy clearly apply. Nor is it inconsistent with Christ's character, what is said in the 5th verse—"This man shall be our peace, when the oppressor shall come into our land;"—supposing, what the style of prophecy and some similar examples will warrant us in supposing, that the prophet describes the future enemies of the Jews under the denomination of the Assyrians, who were their enemies in his time. "Out of Bethlehem shall come forth he that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting." Out of Bethlehem never came any one that we have heard of, except Jesus Christ, to whom these words could belong in any sense, nor any persons

of eminence at all. Bethlehem has for nearly 1700 years been destroyed: it would be difficult, I suppose, to point out the place where it stood; it concerns the Jews therefore to show, if this prophecy did not receive its completion in Christ, how it was fulfilled, or is even possible to be fulfilled, at all. If you come to compute the power of chance, which some call in on every occasion, consider what the chance was, when one small town in a kingdom was pitched upon for the birth of an extraordinary person, that any extraordinary person at all should be born in it; much less one whose character and pretensions especially corresponded with so singular a description, whose goings forth have been of old, and from everlasting. Nothing more remains of this prophecy, than just to observe by what curious and seemingly accidental means divine Providence went about to fulfil its purpose. The parents of Jesus Christ were not inhabitants of Bethlehem; yet at Bethlehem, according to the prophets, was Christ to be born. It so fell out, or rather it was so ordered, that at that precise time a decree was published from the Roman emperor, that the inhabitants of Judea should be taxed —this was the only city to which his family belonged. Joseph and Mary, in pursuance of this decree, repaired to Bethlehem, the city of David, of whose lineage they were; and during the few days of their sojourning there, this illustrious event, the birth of Christ, took place.

I will next introduce to you a very celebrated passage of the prophet Haggai: the circumstances to be explained concerning it are these: Haggai lived after the return of the Jews from the seventy years' captivity in Babylon, just at the time of the building of the second temple of Jerusalem. The first temple, or the temple

of Solomon, having been utterly destroyed by their enemies, the condition of the Jews did not allow them to erect a building equal by any means in magnificence to that of Solomon. The old men, who remembered the former temple in all its splendor, when they saw the very inferior plan and structure of the new edifice, were seized with that melancholy and concern which are always natural in such circumstances. This is described in the book of Ezra with much simplicity:—"But many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice." Now the prophet Haggai was sent on this occasion to encourage those who were engaged in rebuilding the temple, that they might not be cast down by beholding the inferior condition of the new building, in comparison with the wealth and splendor of the old one; and he addresses the governor, the high-priests, and the people at large, in these words—2d chapter, 3d verse—"Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory: and how do ye see it now!—is it not in your eyes in comparison as nothing? yet be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, the son of Josedech, the high-priest; and be strong, O ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work, for I am with you, saith the Lord of Hosts: according to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you; fear ye not. For thus saith the Lord of Hosts"—and here begins the prophecy we have been proposing to introduce—"yet once (it is a little while) and I will shake terribly the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations; and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith

the Lord of Hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of Hosts: the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of Hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts."

Now the first reflection is, that as the second temple had been long since destroyed, if this prophecy be not already fulfilled, it never can be. The opening of the prophecy—"Yet a little while, and I will shake terribly the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land,"—is generally understood to denote the fierce civil commotions which were to precede the coming of the Messiah. Wars and tumults are almost constantly described by the old prophets under the figure of earthquakes, as so many convulsions and discords in the course of nature. It is here also more plainly said in what is added,—"and I will *shake* all nations." When the prophet speaks of the earth, and all nations, it must, in common reason, be understood of those nations and that part of the earth in which the Jews, the persons to whom he spoke, were personally concerned. Now this prophecy, according to this interpretation of it, was fulfilled. The coming of Christ was, in fact, preceded by violent and dreadful civil disturbances. The kingdom of Judea, after suffering many combats between its own princes, was a little before this time subjected to the Roman yoke. The Roman empire itself, which comprehended at that time the greatest part of the known world, and in Scripture sometimes comprehended the whole of it, was, from the death of Julius Cæsar to near the birth of Christ, torn and shaken with civil wars and contests for the supreme power. "The silver and the gold is mine, saith the Lord;"—that is, I value not the splendor of silver and

gold; just as in the 50th Psalm, God declares how little he values their sacrifices, by the same sort of expression —"For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." When God declares that he values not the splendor of silver and gold, in which the former house no doubt *much* excelled, he in effect intimates that the glory and dignity of this latter house should be of a totally different nature from this. I will repeat to you the prophecy, which these two parts of it interpreted. After violent wars and tumults amongst the whole world, the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts—the glory of gold and silver, in which the former house so much excelled, I value not: the glory of this latter house, which must consequently be of a different nature, shall be greater than that of the former, saith the Lord of Hosts; and in this place will I give peace. Who sees not Jesus Christ pointed out in this prophecy? "The desire of all nations shall come." Who was the desire of all nations? He was a blessing to all, as his commission extended to all, and as, in fact, he was expected by most: for the expectation of some extraordinary person being then about to appear in the world was at that time almost universal. Of what other Jew can this, or any thing of this sort, be said?

The second temple frequently received under its roof this divine person, and was the scene of his prodigious miracles:—thus was it filled with glory, and that of the greatest and highest kind; in this respect was the glory of the latter house greater than of the former. "And in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord."

Hear Saint Paul:—"He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken the middle wall of partition betwixt us, and that he might reconcile both

unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby; and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them which were nigh: for through him we both have access by one spirit unto the Father."

How exactly do the prophet and the apostle agree! The peace here meant is peace or reconciliation with God, which it was our Saviour's declared purpose to preach and to produce.

The last prophecy I will detain you with at present is to be found in the 3d chapter of Malachi, and the 1st verse. Here are these words: "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in." What is to be observed of this prophecy lies in a very little compass. "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me." Here is an exact description of the office and character of John the Baptist, who came expressly to prepare the way before Jesus Christ; that is, to announce his approach, and prepare mankind for his reception. "And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple; even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in"—that is, the Messiah himself, whom they so earnestly expected, and from whom they promised themselves so much, should suddenly appear. "Suddenly;" that is, after the messenger that was to prepare his way. This is a very explicit prophecy, and has no difficulty in it, if you take care not to be misled by the term, to suppose the messenger that was to prepare the way, and the messenger of the covenant, to be the same; whereas, if you examine the prophecy with attention, you will soon see that the one

means the Messiah himself—the other his forerunner. For the messenger is to prepare the way before whom? Before nothing, unless the Lord, whom ye seek, the messenger of the covenant, be a different person from him. So that two distinct persons are plainly foretold in the prophecy, who were to be associated in the same plan and commission; who were, that is, the one to be introduced to give notice of the approach of the other: both indeed called messengers from God, but of different degrees and denominations; the one the messenger to prepare the way—the other the messenger of the covenant; the one necessarily to precede the other; the second, or greater messenger, to appear soon, or immediately after his forerunner, to supersede his office, as being preparatory to his own. No Christian, it may be hoped, is so ill versed in the gospel history as not to perceive the correspondence of all the circumstances, as to the appearance and preaching of John the Baptist and of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist assumed nothing, delivered nothing, in his own name:—"I am not he." His preaching and functions all referred to another: himself was the messenger of God, but only to prepare the way for a greater. That greater messenger suddenly followed—the messenger of the covenant—who came into the world to convey from the Father, and communicate to the whole race of man, the knowledge and the condition of eternal salvation.

XL.

PROPHECIES.

(PART III.)

ACTS XXVIII. 23.

And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging, to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God; persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.

THE next prophecy, in the order and manner I have proposed to mention them, is from the 9th chapter of Daniel, and begins at the 24th verse, as follows: "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the time spoken of, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem until Messiah the prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks; and the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times; and after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, and the end thereof shall be with a flood,

and unto the end of the war desolations are determined; and he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week, and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined, shall be poured upon the desolate."

Now in this prophecy, amongst some places that are dark and obscure, there are others which point out the coming and character of Jesus Christ in very plain words. I believe the best way of considering it will be, first, to lay out of the question that of the computation of the time, which forms a material part of the prophecy. Now, that for the present being omitted, it appears, I think, that at some future period, the Most Holy, the Messiah, the Saviour should appear, and that he should be cut off, that is, be put to death, but not for himself, and that some future and foreign nation should then destroy the city and the sanctuary.

I hardly need observe that, supposing Jesus Christ to be the person meant in this prophecy, all this was punctually fulfilled. I will repeat to you the former part of the prophecy, and you will judge whether it is not as plainly foretold. "From the going forth of this commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem until Messiah the prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks the street shall be built again, and the wall, in troublous times; and after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself; and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and sanctuary."

The next thing to be represented is, from the description that is given of what was to come to pass at this appointed time, that it corresponds with the office

and ministry of Christ. "Seventy weeks," the prophecy begins, "are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city." To do what? "To finish transgression, to make an end of sin, to make a reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up the vision of prophecy, and to anoint the most holy." First; at this time transgressions were to be finished, and sins made an end of. The epistle to the Hebrews twice describes the Christian scheme in words borrowed from the prophet Jeremiah, and which, in effect, say the same thing that is here foretold. "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities I will remember no more." Secondly; if this reconciliation was to be made for iniquity, or as it might better be rendered, iniquity to be expiated, who knows not that he is the "propitiation for our sins;" "that now, even at the end of the world, he hath appeared, to put away sins by the sacrifice of himself?" Again, everlasting righteousness was to be brought in: "This is his name, the Lord our righteousness." "A sceptre of righteousness," says the epistle to the Hebrews, "is the sceptre of thy kingdom," that is the doctrine of the gospel. The 5th chapter and 13th verse of the same epistle is emphatically called "the word of righteousness." It does not appear that any of these expressions were applied with a view to the prophecy of Daniel: nor do I think it material to the argument, whether they were applied to Christ in a literal or figurative sense, because if these bear any sense so easy and natural as to lead his followers to apply these expressions to him afterwards, they might in the same sense, no doubt, be predicted of him before. The two remaining clauses of the verse, "to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy," are

commonly supposed to signify the accomplishing the vision and consummating the prophecy, both which were done by the death of Christ. "Jesus knowing that all these things were now accomplished, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, said 'I thirst;' and when he received the vinegar, he said, 'It is finished,' and he bowed his head and gave up the ghost." The great outlines of the prophecy generally, I think, must apply to Christ.

We must now enter a little into the circumstances of the time, which were assigned with great precision, and composes a principal part of the whole prophecy. "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy holy city." This is afterwards spoken of under two distinct periods: "From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem shall be seven weeks and three-score and two weeks." Now I believe it is pretty generally allowed, both by Jews and Christians, that the weeks here meant are weeks, not of days, but of years; a week that is, being seven years instead of seven days. This way of reckoning, which seems odd enough to us, had nothing in it unintelligible to a Jew. Every seventh year was with them like every seventh day—a year of rest for the land and husbandry, and called the sabbatical year. This made the periods of seven years a familiar division of time to them; and it is not unnatural to call it a week of years, as it consists, like the common weeks, of seven parts, and the seventh in both was a sabbath. But this is not all. A similar computation is used in their book, which they are best acquainted with, the book of the law. In the 25th of Leviticus and the 8th verse, the observation of the Jubilee is enjoined in the following terms: "And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven

times seven years." Sabbaths of years, you observe, is a plural very like the weeks of years spoken of in Daniel; but, what is more, in the next chapter to this of Daniel, and about the beginning of it, there are the following remarkable words: "I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all till three whole weeks were fulfilled." Weeks of days it is in the original, though our translators have improperly rendered it three whole weeks. Now this expression, "weeks of days," is a plain indication that the weeks he had been speaking of before were not weeks of days. Reckoning then a week a week of years, or a term of seven years, it was to be seventy weeks, or 490 years, from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem, unto Messiah the prince. And in fact it was so: it was 490 years betwixt the Jews being re-incorporated into a people after their captivity, and a holy city, and the death of Christ. There are two other parts of the prophecy which seem to answer according to this interpretation: verse 29th, "Yet he shall confirm this covenant with me for one week." For one week—that is, for seven years. Now, in fact, it was for just seven years that the covenant was preached to the Jews, and confirmed with many of them: for seven years after the death of Christ was the first calling of the Gentiles, and from thence we may date the rejection of the Jews. And again, in the 27th verse, "In the middle of the week," or, as it should be translated, in half a week, "he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease." Now the Roman army were three years and a half (about half a week of years), from their first invasion of Judea, to the final destruction of the city and temple, when

sacrifice and the oblation of necessity ceased. At this distance of time, and with the disadvantages we are under, it is not to be wondered at if there should be some difficulty or some uncertainty in this computation; but this single expression, "Messiah shall be cut off, but not for himself, and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary," so plainly and precisely agrees with the death of Christ, and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, that it can never, I think, be got over.

I have now laid before you all the prophecies I intended to produce: by no means, however, all the prophecies that are generally understood to relate to Christ, nor as some perhaps may think, the clearest; but they are those which, in my judgement, carry upon the face of them the apparent application to Jesus Christ, and were the easiest to be explained. As a sequel to the short exposition, if such it can be deemed, it may not be unsuitable to the argument to collect, into one point, the various particulars concerning Christ, described and comprised in the prophecies we have quoted from the Old Testament.

First, then, I take it to be manifest that, according to these prophecies, some extraordinary person or other was to be expected to appear. I take this to be manifest, not only from the words and terms of the prophecies themselves, but because the Jews universally, upon the strength of these prophecies, did, in fact, expect such a person, and there was no difference of opinion at all upon this head. Those who received Christ, and those who rejected him, did all acknowledge that the Messiah, an extraordinary person, was to arrive amongst them. Christians and Jews are agreed also

upon this head at this day. But the fact of an extraordinary person being foretold, and an extraordinary person appearing, would not alone be sufficient to build upon, unless some further and more appropriate circumstances be found in the prophecies to identify and describe him.

These circumstances may be reduced to the following heads: The time of his appearance; the place of his appearance; the circumstances of his birth, his nature, and his office.

First, the time of his appearance. It was to be "whilst the sceptre continued with the tribe of Judah," after it had departed from the other tribes, and when it was about also to depart from this; it was to be during the standing of the second temple, after violent civil commotions in the world; it was to be near the time that "the people of the prince that should come would destroy the temple and the sanctuary;" it was to be, "seventy weeks, or 490 years, from the going forth of the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem." Exactly at such a time Christ did in fact appear.

Secondly, the place of his appearance. "He was to be of the seed of Abraham and of David, and to come out of Bethlehem of Judea." Christ was a descendant of Abraham's and of the house of David, and was born at Bethlehem.

Thirdly, the circumstances of his birth. He was to be preceded by a forerunner, and "to be born of a virgin." Christ was preceded by John the Baptist, and, as is related of him, born of a virgin.

Fourthly, his nature. "He was to be Immanuel, or God with us." His years, further, "were of old and from everlasting." He was the "anointed," "the prince," "the most Holy:" If we acknowledge his

claims, he was all this, and in a sense that no other man ever pretended to.

Fifthly, his office. He was to be a "blessing to all nations." "Unto him was the gathering of the people to be." "He was to be ruler in Israel;" "he was to be the desire of all nations;" "he was to excel in glory of a different kind from the splendour of gold and silver;" he was to be the person whom they so earnestly expected, and from whom they promised themselves so great things; he was to give "peace;" "he was to be cut off, but not for himself;" "he was to finish transgressions, to make an end of sin, to extirpate iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness." How truly all these may be said of Jesus Christ, in a literal or scriptural sense, you must judge for yourselves. I think I have shown that these things were all, in fact, though in other words, said of him by his followers, who understood his character and office best, and who wrote without any views or desire to become public men.

There is but one objection that I can here take notice of, which is, that it does not appear from the prophecies themselves that these particulars were foretold of one and the same person. I allow that it does not appear from the prophecies themselves; but if they were all in fact fulfilled by, we presume it is an evidence that they were all intended for, one person; for, supposing that these particulars might, for any thing that appears in the prophecy, belong to one or to different persons, their uniting in one person is not less extraordinary or more likely to happen by accident: and therefore such an union in the event is good proof of the design and completion of the prophecy.

I conclude the whole subject with the observation

I set out with, namely, that there is but one point at issue—but one question to be tried—whether this circumstantial completion of the prophecies, and in so many particulars, could or could not merely happen by accident. If you think it might, why then the argument must be given up. If you think it could not, or that it is not probable it could, then you have one reason at least for the faith that is in you—a solid and satisfactory proof of the truth of our religion.

XLI.

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

(PART I.)

JOHN XX. 31.

But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through his name.

THE direct historical evidence of Christianity is contained in three propositions; which, if they can each be made out satisfactorily, amount together to a demonstration of the truth of our religion. However, when I call them the direct historical evidence, you are not to suppose that it is the only evidence—there are abundance of circumstances, both external and internal, which corroborate this evidence, which, however, I cannot enter upon now; because, in a subject so various and comprehensive, we must be content to consider one part at one time.

The three points are these:—

First: that the books of the New Testament were actually written by the persons whose names they bear.

Secondly: that those persons could not be themselves deceived in what they give an account of.

Thirdly: that they could have no reason, nor can it be conceived that they should attempt, to deceive or impose upon others.

The first of these propositions will be enough for one discourse; namely—The books of the New Testament were actually written by the authors whose names they bear; the Gospels by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the Acts of the Apostles, by Luke; the Epistles by Paul, Peter, John, &c.

Now, as to this point, there is, first, the general evidence, and there is, secondly, the particular testimony.

By the general evidence, I mean, that by which we believe and are assured, on reading any book, that it was written by the author to whom it is ascribed, and which is no other than its being ascribed to such an author so far back as we are able to trace; which circumstance is sufficient, when no opposite evidence appears, nor any thing in the writing itself contradicts it, to convince any man. Upon this ground we believe (and no one, that I know of, doubts it or contradicts it) that the last great poem which bears his name was Milton's; the History Lord Clarendon's; and many years ago, that the Commentaries were Cæsar's, the Orations Cicero's, the Æneid Virgil's. Now, to say the least, there is the same reason for believing that the Gospel was Matthew's or John's; the Epistle, Paul's or Peter's: and the reason upon which the belief of mankind proceeds in these cases is very satisfactory, and will seldom deceive them: which reason is this—that a book could hardly have gotten the reputation of belonging to any author, unless it was acknowledged as such (namely, as the work of this author,) by his contemporaries in the age in which he lived; and that the same contemporaries in the age in which the author lived could hardly be deceived in ascribing it to him. But this matter is best supported by instances. We of this age and

country know that such a particular History of England was written by Hume: we know it, because it bears his name, or because he mentions himself as the author in the ending of the work, or without these, it is universally imputed to him, and he sits quiet under the imputation of it. Now the generation which comes next, after we and he are all dead and gone, will believe and know that it is Hume's History; for they will know that we, the predecessors, who were contemporaries of the author, believed it to be written by him, and that this belief of ours, for the reasons above-mentioned, could hardly be mistaken. Their opinion is founded upon what they know to have been ours, and the next generation upon theirs: and this point—who is the author of the books?—when it is once public, and notorious, and agreed upon, is not much altered or diminished in its evidence by length of time. So far as I can see, it will be as certain, or nearly so, three hundred years hence, that Milton was the author of the poem, as it is now; that Cicero was the author of the Orations will be just as evident to the next generation as to this, and to a thousand generations after the next. And this is the general evidence, supposing there was nothing but credit and general reputation to go upon—which tradition and reputation, as to the authors of books, do not often deceive us: and we desire no other credit upon this point to the books of Scripture than to any other.

But besides the general evidence, founded upon the general tradition, there is also a vast quantity of particular testimony, that is, the certainty of other very ancient books existing, especially asserting the books of Scripture to be authenticated and of undoubted authority, and quoting passages from them as such.

We have a great many books written, some fourteen or fifteen, some sixteen hundred years ago; some by disciples of the apostles; others by their disciples; which speak of four Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, thirteen Epistles, not only as credible and excellent, but as never disputed, and such as never had been disputed; as equal to the oracles of the Old Testament, as divinely inspired, as the words of the Spirit, the law and the oracles of God; the rule of faith, which cannot be contradicted without great guilt; with many other expressions of the like kind. This is direct testimony. But there is a species of testimony which is not direct, but quite as satisfactory, if not more so: it is this:—when ancient writers quote texts and passages of the Scripture—either noting the author, or the book without the author, or neither—but borrowing the expression as being that of authors applicable to the argument:—now such quotations prove to an absolute certainty, both that the books so used and so borrowed existed at the time, and were attributed to the author at the time, whenever the author is mentioned, and were received as books of authority, at least, in the opinion of the person who makes the quotation. If Hume, in his History, quotes a passage from Scripture, or Lord Clarendon's History, it is as full a demonstration a thousand years hence, if both histories live so long, that Clarendon's History was written at the time, and was acknowledged to be Clarendon's History, and was as such acknowledged, and believed, and received as a history of authority:—and this is the very sort of demonstration in which we abound; for there are more quotations of the single Gospel of Saint Matthew, in old books written within 150 years after the resurrection of Christ, than there

are of all the works of Cicero, from the time they were written to this time; and the books in which these quotations are found were written, one in Palestine, one in Italy, one in Africa, and in different parts of Asia—which shows that those books were known and acknowledged, not only in one particular place, amongst one particular sect of men, but that they were spread, comparatively speaking, over the world, and received by people in all countries, who knew nothing of each other. Now, as I said before, these quotations are, on one account, the most satisfactory kind of proof. When a writer tells us expressly that such a book was written by such an author, or that such a work was of great credit and authority, he may tell us so with a design to deceive us; but in this sort of quotation there is no design at all. This proves the existence and capital authenticity of the books from which they are extracted, without the authors who made the extracts even suspecting that they would be applied to for that purpose. This argument in support of the authenticity of the Scriptures is common to the Scriptures with any or almost all other ancient books. There are, besides this, several considerations peculiar to the Scriptures, which greatly corroborate the general argument, being more easily comprehended and retained.

First: if the books of the New Testament were the rule of life and faith to the primitive Christians, and received by them as such, it was exceedingly their concern; and it is but reasonable to suppose that they would take care to inform themselves of the origin and authority of these books, and avoid being imposed upon by fraud or artifice, in matters in which they were so highly interested. No one ever attempted to forge an act of parliament; and the attempt is manifestly im-

possible—and why? Because those who were to obey and be bound by it would take care to have satisfaction of its authority before they submitted to it. The same reason applies to the books of Scripture, which are as so many laws to the professors of Christianity.

Secondly: these books from the first were read, as they are now, in the churches and assemblies of the primitive Christians, and these books only: which was both a strong and public acknowledgement of their authority, and even of their exclusive authority; and that by a great number of differing and distant churches. A Russian traveller in Asia made it his object to inquire, and found the same books used in all churches: and this was withal a complete security from any corruption or alteration which could be introduced into them. I defy any man living to make now-a-days any alteration in our Bible; because its being constantly read in public, and being by that means both so dispersed, and so well known, the alteration must immediately be detected.

Thirdly: from very early, nay, perhaps from the first ages of Christianity, there were disputes, sects, and divisions amongst Christians. Now all sects appealed to these books for the confirmation of their opinions. Those who found any thing in the books to confirm their opinion produced it to gainsay the adversary: those who found any thing seemingly contrary to their opinions reconciled and explained it as well as they could; but they all agreed in referring themselves and one another to the books. This is the strongest evidence in the world: for all those who agreed in nothing else agreed in reading these same books; when they were disputing with the utmost vehemence with one another, all sides left the disputes to be decided by these books.

It shows, I think, incontrovertibly, the high esteem in which these books were, and that they could not be controverted, whatever else they might be. If one party attempted to forge a work in the name of an apostle, in order to support a favourite opinion, the opposite party, we may depend upon it, would search out the forgery and expose it; or if one party attempted to insert a text or passage, they would never prevail upon the adversary to allow it, so as to obtain uncontested credit. The vigilance of contending parties is the best security in the world against fraud and contradiction on either side.

Fourthly: the primitive Christians did not receive the books of the New Testament in the lump, without distinction or inquiry; but appear to have exercised due caution and circumspection. The four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen Epistles of Paul, one of Peter, and one of John, were received, so far as appears, universally and without dispute. The Epistle to the Hebrews, James, the second of Peter, the second and third of John, Jude, and the Revelations, were for a while dubious, though afterwards admitted as genuine.

Now, had none of them ever been doubted, it might have been said it was because no one of them was inquired into; but some of them being doubted, shows there was inquiry, there was caution; and this is, in my judgement, the strongest imaginable confirmation of the rest. What were the reasons of the doubts, or how they were afterwards cleared up, is not now the question. It affords a fair presumption that there was no room to doubt on any of the rest; because when there was any such room, you find scruples, hesitations, and disagreements. An historian who wrote an account and history of the Christian religion between two and three hundred

years after Christ's death, speaking of the books in use amongst Christians, divides them into three kinds:—those which were pretended to be written by the apostles or apostolic men, but rejected by the church; those which had been doubted, but afterwards received; and those, lastly, which had never, that he could learn, by any of the almost innumerable Christian churches or societies, been doubted or disputed at all—which distinction is exact and judicious, and settling the authority of the last set beyond controversy; because it is established upon the unconscious and unanimous consent of a vast number of Christian congregations, independent of one another, and who, as appears, were sufficiently disposed to doubt and disagree, where there was room for it.

I acknowledge that spurious pieces were published under the names of the apostles; but I contend that they never were received and acknowledged by the primitive Christians, in the way and with the consent that these Scriptures were. They may be once or twice repeated by others; they were read and perhaps quoted; but those who read them and doubted of them, or were inclined to doubt them, always made a vast difference betwixt these and the books of which there was no doubt.

I will add two reflections, which belong particularly to Saint Paul's epistles. Saint Paul appears to have generally employed some one to write his epistles, either from his own mouth or another copy he gave him; but then to avoid the abuse of it, he always wrote a little—probably his benediction—in his own hand, expressly to prove it to be his own, and to guard the people he wrote to against any imposition. "The salutation of me, Paul, with my own hand, which is the token in every

epistle; so I write." Generally the person by whom it was sent is mentioned in the ending of the epistle. No one, therefore, would present the epistle but that person; and he must be known as coming from Saint Paul. A great number of persons are saluted by name, who, as well as the whole church, would no doubt see the letter, —and particularly the first Epistle to the Thessalonians is directed to be read in all the churches. Now this very circumstance, in my judgement, made a forgery impossible: any such forgery during Paul's lifetime must have been discovered by his subsequent communication with the church; and if such epistle was not produced till after his death, then this plain objection must have overthrown its credit. "Here it is directed in the very body of the letter that it be publicly read in the church, and the church has never heard or seen, or been told of it, till now."

My last reflection is this: in all Saint Paul's epistles, there is an earnestness and a vehemence; I might call it an enthusiasm, and a passionate style, which I will undertake to say none could counterfeit; nor could such be found in any man's writings who was not thoroughly and entirely convinced of the truth of this religion. Let any one read Saint Paul's epistles with this view, and I am convinced he will confess that the author of these epistles, be he who he would, was really persuaded of the truth of what he wrote; not to mention the obscurity in many, or in most indeed, of his epistles, which a forger would have avoided.

Upon the whole, I trust that I have established this fundamental point to your satisfaction—that the books of Scripture were really written by the persons to whom they were ascribed. The remaining points we must reserve.

house at Jerusalem; was acquainted with the apostles; that he was a disciple of some note and distinction, for it was to his house that Peter went when he was miraculously delivered out of prison, and where he found many gathered together and praying. Soon after this, he left Jerusalem to accompany Barnabas and Paul in their expedition to the Gentiles. After residing with them for some time, he left them and returned to Jerusalem, which return afterwards occasioned a dispute betwixt Barnabas and Paul: Barnabas being desirous to keep Mark with him, Paul, not thinking it good to take him, departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. Saint Paul, however, long after this, begged Timothy to bring Mark along with him to Rome, "For he is profitable to me for the ministry;" so that the offence, whatever it was, was made up. The account delivered down to us by many historians is, that Mark attended upon Peter, and wrote his Gospel under Peter's eye, and by his direction. However we are the less solicitous to ascertain any thing further concerning Mark, because there is hardly any thing in his Gospel which is not contained in that by Saint Matthew. Thus much appears, that although he might not perhaps have been an eye-witness of many of the transactions he records (which, whether he was or not, cannot now be known), he was a companion of apostles, and apostolically aiding and assisting some of those in the ministry. At his house the first disciples, according to their custom, used to meet. He was probably the friend of Peter, as Peter went to his house the first place after his deliverance from prison; and what is as material as any thing, he was living at Jerusalem, the very spot where the most important part of Christ's miracles were exhibited.

Saint Luke wrote his Gospel, and the Acts of the Apostles. He was the companion and fellow-traveller of Paul, as appears both from his speaking in the first person plural in his account of Saint Paul's travels,— "*We* went;" "it was determined that *we* should sail into Italy;" "it came to pass when *we* were gone forth," and other passages of the same kind, which show that the writer of the history was one of the company.

We find him also with Saint Peter at Rome, when Saint Paul wrote the first chapter of his second epistle to Timothy. The preface to Saint Luke's Gospel is exceedingly worthy of notice: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things, which are most surely believed among us, even as *they* delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed."

Now this short preface informs us of a great deal. It informs us, first, that the great facts of the Gospel history were most surely believed amongst the Christians of those times. It informs us, secondly, upon what grounds they are believed, namely, as *they* delivered them, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses. It acknowledges, thirdly, that he himself was not an eye-witness, but that he received the account from those who were: writing as they delivered the instances. It asserts, fourthly, that Saint Luke had a perfect understanding of all things from the first, or, as it should have been rendered, he had penned and traced every account up to its source, to the fountain-head, and so

as to have no doubt in his mind; for he professes, you see, to inform Theophilus of the certainty of those things wherein he had been instructed.

In the Acts of the Apostles, Saint Luke having, as I said before, to attend and accompany Saint Paul, was eye-witness of many things which he there relates; in particular, Luke was with Paul in the ship when that extraordinary wreck happened, by which they were thrown ashore on the island of Malta; he lodged with Paul in the same house when he miraculously healed one of the family, and many other diseased persons in the island. He must have known, therefore, with absolute certainty, the truth or falsehood of what he relates about it.

The thirteen epistles of Paul, though not properly historical, contain incidents, in connexion with the transactions of his life, of the miracles he saw or wrought, or references and allusions to those, which is the same thing; and in various places he refers to his miraculous conversion, particularly in the first chapter of Galatians, where he says he received his doctrine, "not of man, nor was he taught of men, but immediately by the revelation of Jesus Christ;" and then, by way of proof of it, reminds them of our Saviour being revealed to him at the very time he was persecuting the church of Christ. The same in the twelfth chapter of his second epistle to the Corinthians: "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell, God knoweth); such an one caught up to the third heaven." And at the fifteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, speaking of the different appearances of Christ after his resurrection, he adds, in reference to a vision he had of Christ at his conversion, "Last of all

he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." Upon other occasions, Saint Paul speaks in his epistles of the miracles himself had wrought. 2 Cor. xii. 13. "Truly," says he, "how the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds." To the Galatians, third chapter and fifth verse: "He therefore that ministereth to you the spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" To the Corinthians, in the first epistle, "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than you all." Now here could be no mistake. Saint Paul certainly knew whether he did or did not see Christ at his conversion; whether he did or did not show signs, or wonders, or mighty deeds at Corinth; whether he did or did not work miracles in Galatia; whether he did or did not speak with tongues. I lay the greatest stress upon the evidence of Saint Paul's epistles, because the very matter and manner of composition of them carry with them the force of demonstration, that the author of them was in earnest; not to mention that his appeal to the miracles he wrought, in the texts I have quoted, was with no desire of publicity and authority, or handing down the memory of these miracles to posterity, but merely for the sake of the argument in hand. The very mention of them, one may say, was accidental: so far was he from any design to impose the narrative of false miracles upon the world.

Next to Saint Paul's the epistle of Saint Peter may be produced in testimony of this authenticity. Saint Peter, you all know, was an apostle from the first to the last; a companion of our Saviour; admitted, together with James and John, to more privacy and intimacy with their master than the rest; and held a

long and remarkable conversation with Christ after his resurrection. If any one had an opportunity of knowing the truth of the transactions of Christ's life, it was he. Besides speaking in general in his epistles of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection (of all which he must have known the truth or falsehood), he bears witness in his second epistle to one memorable circumstance in Christ's history, which he himself, he tells us, saw and heard—and this was the transfiguration of Christ, at which, you read in the Gospel, he and James and John alone were present: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty: for he received from God the Father honour and glory when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;' and this voice, which came from heaven, we heard when we were with him in the holy mount." No testimony can be more explicitly authenticated and better founded than this.

James and Jude were both apostles; and, by their epistles, bear testimony to the general truth of the Christian religion, and, consequently, to the certainty of the resurrection of Christ; for I suppose it will not be disputed, but that any one who believed Christianity believed the resurrection of Christ. Of the facts of the resurrection these two, together with the other apostles, were eye-witnesses.

The miracles therefore, recorded in the New Testament, come down to us attested by Matthew and John; in the Acts of the Apostles, by Paul, Peter, James, and Jude, as eye-witnesses; by Saint Mark, to say the least of him, a companion and friend of those who had been

eye-witnesses of these miracles, and being upon the spot when the greater part of them was performed; by Saint Luke in his Gospel, an attendant upon Paul, who sifted every thing to the bottom, and gave these accounts as they were delivered by those who, from the beginning, were eye-witnesses: and their being so circumstanced, there is no possibility of mistake in any, or at least in the whole. It is quite a different case from a set of rumours and reports handed from one to another, and repeated after one another, of which each reporter, if he knew from whom he had it, pretends to know nothing more. It is different from accounts published in one country of what has been done or is doing in another, where the publisher of the accounts, from the very distance at which he is situated, can know nothing for himself. It is still more different from histories of travels, which appeared many ages before the history we have, and of which the historian could know very little of what he relates, and with little more authority than ourselves. The Gospel historians are sufficiently acquainted with the truth or falsehood of any or most of the facts they relate: if the facts be not so, it is wilful and designed deceit.

Again; and which is a second consideration. The facts themselves were of such a nature that they were capable of being known with absolute certainty—they were of such a nature as, if the accounts be allowed, were unquestionably miraculous. A diseased person, upon the application of a supposed remedy, either natural or supernatural, may recover from his disease; and it may remain in doubt how far the remedy was successful in the cure, because it cannot be known whether the disease would not have abated of itself, or whether imagination might not contribute to

it; but when a man, blind or lame from his birth, is made to see and walk by a word in an instant, there is no room for any supposition of other interference. Nor was the power of working miracles confined to such cures. There are many acts wrought by miracles besides cures, as turning the water into wine, feeding the five thousand with a few loaves and fishes, blighting the fig-tree, walking on the sea, and, above all, raising the dead. Lastly, which is a very material consideration, the miracles of Christ were of a permanent kind, such as would be very capable of being examined and inquired into afterwards. It was not like a spectre, appearing and disappearing on a sudden, and where, consequently, the whole proof must rest only upon the credit of those who saw it at that moment. The thing in that case was gone and vanished, and admitted no search or investigation. When the blind man was restored to sight, as related in the 8th chapter of John, he continued upon the spot and to enjoy the use of his sight. We hear that he was produced and examined after the miracle, as he had all along lived and was known there before it. When the lame man, at the gate of the temple, was cured by Peter and John, the cure continued: every one that pleased was at liberty to inquire into and examine it, if they disputed the reality of it. It did not depend upon what the apostles or any one said: his condition before the miracle was notorious, and he was there for them to examine as to his condition after it. When Lazarus was raised from the dead, he did not die again immediately—merely speak or move, then sink into his former state—but he lived, and ate, and conversed like other people. The Jews and all had the opportunity, and many of them, we read, did go down to Bethany

to see him, sat at table with him, and at length the rulers formed a design of ruining and putting him to death for it.

Upon the whole, the facts are of such a nature, the persons who related them so prepared with knowledge and information, that I think we may rest satisfied in holding that they could not be imposed upon or deceived in what they tell us—that we have all the assurance of the truth of these reports which the number, credit, character of any witnesses or allegations can give us.

XLIII.

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

(PART III.)

JOHN XX. 31.

But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that, believing, ye might have life through his name.

THE only remaining supposition is, that the evangelists, the apostles, and many writers and preachers of the gospel, have all entered into a confederacy of imposing their story upon the world; for if the facts they relate, and their relation with respect to them, were of such a nature that they could not by any possibility be mistaken—that no enthusiasm or even madness will account for their being deceived in them—there is nothing left but either to admit these facts to be true, or to say that the disciples purposely joined and went about to cheat and deceive men. Now before we proceed any further, I would observe that this may always be said. In any cause or trial, let the fact be proved ever so clearly by witnesses ever so positive or many, or of ever so good character, it is easy to say that they have combined to impose upon the court—it is easy to say so, but nobody believes it, nobody attends to it, or is affected by it. The cause is decided upon the testimony

of these witnesses, and every one can rest satisfied with the decision, and can have no doubt about the matter; whereas those who were interested on the other side, when they had nothing else left to say, would have insinuated that the witnesses were all forsworn, and that it was all a story not to be believed.

But to return—let us now inquire into the probability, or even the possibility, of the supposition, that it was a conspiracy in the friends of Christianity to carry on a cheat.

Now the first impression which this supposition includes, and which alone, I conceive, would stagger the belief of any reasonable man, is that a handful of fishermen in a small town, near the lake of Galilee, should take into their heads a scheme of covertly setting up a new religion, and converting the world to it, and should leave their homes, families, and business, upon this errand, and should expect success in it by means of a tale made up of lies and forgeries. Is this creditable? Is it conceivable? Is it consistent with any principle in human nature or in the nature of things? Is there any instance of such an attempt in the history of the world? That Mahomet at the head of a victorious army should set up pretensions to a divine commission, and endeavour to establish a religion which redounded so much to the interest and glory of himself and his family, is nothing unnatural. With these advantages Mahomet appealed, as did the apostles, to public miracles. Had the apostles been statesmen or philosophers, there would have been more likelihood of such contrivances amongst them, as such men may some of them entertain ambitious views, and from their influence and celebrity might imagine themselves qualified for such an undertaking; but that a set of low and illiterate mechanics (for from such it is allowed both by

friends and enemies that christianity originated) should conceive a plan of this kind, knowing all the while the falsehood of what they were delivering, is too wild and extravagant a supposition to account for any of these stories; for, always active in finding out what may supply their wants—in carving and contriving at all times, the lower, laborious part of mankind have enough to do to support themselves and their families—their wants, their occupation, their domestic duties and affections are sufficient to engage the whole of their attention and employment. Is a scheme of setting up a religion in the world very likely to interest or engage such as these? or is it probable that such as these should plot and contrive together to do nothing less than to overturn the established religion in all countries of the world, and introduce into the place of it a fabulous tale of their own contriving? I know that we have examples of people of very low estate and little education quitting their own calling to turn preachers of religion; but that bears no resemblance to the present case, for these persons are most, or all of them, I think, sure of what they go about: whereas the apostles, evangelists, and first founders of christianity must, according to this account, have been impostors, and have known in their own breasts that they were so. Besides, these persons are led to what they do by the example of others in superior station, and after all do not aspire at founding a new religion, but only an unusual method of explaining or propagating the old one.

But secondly, what was it that all the apostles went about to overturn—the attachment of men to virtue and holiness? It must be allowed, whether what they wrote and preached was true or false, that the behaviour and morality which they inculcated were excellent; since all acknowledged, even those who were inclined to ques-

tion the religion most, that whatever they inculcated, they required. They insisted upon the most perfect purity, benevolence, justice, obedience, piety. Now, what would this accomplish? Was it from a virtuous motive that they enjoined on all their followers these virtues, as they certainly did? Such a motive excludes the supposition of imposture. In many instances the best motives may be mistaken; but it is impossible that with these motives any one could carry on a continued deliberate plan of deceiving and cheating others. Read those passages of the epistles especially, which exhort to virtue and holiness—with what a strain of lively earnestness and zeal the exhortations run! with what threats and denunciations they warn men from vice! with what entreaties they invite them to virtue! how they over and over again declare and protest the worth of a life of virtue, that religion without such a life is nothing—that nothing else, that nothing besides holiness in heart, principle, and practice, would conduct themselves and their followers to salvation! and then reflect, how we are to believe that the authors of the Epistles were all the while themselves carrying on a cheat and an imposture, knowing in their hearts that what they were telling their followers was all falsehood and fable.

Thirdly, what had the apostles to gain by the scheme? did they distinguish themselves or their families? did any of them advance thereby their posterity to honours, and favours, and high states? was there any prospect or probability of such advancement? Here is an infallible rule, an impostor has always something to get by his imposition: he may not get it; that is another thing; he aims at some advantage to himself or friends; and thus it becomes a natural consideration

and inquiry, was there any interest to bias them? Now if ever men were disinterested, the apostles were; upon all occasions they declined and reprobated the idea of taking any thing of their converts. "I have coveted," says Saint Paul in his pathetic farewell to the church of Macedonia, "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel; nay, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my necessities, and to them that were with me." When Simon Magus offered them money for some of their supernatural powers: "Thy money," replied Peter, "perish with thee, because thou hast thought the gift of God may be purchased with money."—"Did I make a gain of you," says Saint Paul to the Corinthians, "by any of them whom I sent unto you; did Titus make a gain of you?" The apostles, it is true, had all an opportunity of making themselves masters of the fortunes of their followers; and that was when the disciples at Jerusalem, as you read in the 4th chapter of the Acts, in the height of their zeal sold their lands and houses, and brought the prices of those things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet; how did the apostles behave upon this occasion? So far from taking advantage of the unlimited confidence of their followers to their own interest and use, they embraced the first opportunity of getting rid of their charge, only receiving the contributions of the rich, and distributing them amongst the poor, and transferring it to some men appointed for that purpose, not by themselves, but by the people at large, as you find in the 6th chapter of Acts. So that there is no pretence for charging them with seeking their own profit, or following a profession which promised gain. If it be said that they might be drawn in by the expectation of honours and advancement from

the Messiah himself, under the notion, which they probably in common with the other Jews entertained of the Messiah himself, I answer, they could not be so drawn in, if they knew him to be an impostor, which they must have known, if he was one, and which is the supposition we are now arguing upon; for the question now is, what they were to gain or look for from a scheme which they knew to be founded in falsehood and deceit.

Fourthly, this is not all—the apostles and first teachers of Christianity had not only nothing to gain by the lie, supposing it to have been one, but had every thing to fear and every thing to suffer in support of it. Here indeed is the great strength and stress of the Christian evidence. It is certain that the founder of the Christian religion suffered death upon the cross for the undertaking: it seems equally certain that the apostles and first of his followers underwent all manner of persecution, and many of them martyrdom, for their opinions. This is expressly stated in Scripture. It is confirmed by corresponding accounts of heathen writers, who being enemies to Christianity, cannot be suspected of giving false testimony in its favour; and who described the first Christians as resolutely undergoing stripes, imprisonment, and death, rather than renounce or impugn the truth of their religion: and these accounts come near to the times of the apostles, if not to their times. Add to which, that the thing itself was in the highest degree probable, and, morally speaking, certain, that the setters-up and maintainers of a religion which overthrew all other religions, diverse and irreconcileable to, or, as it were, directly against, the established tenets and prejudice of both Jews and Gentiles, should meet with opposition from the rulers and teachers of this world,

who were all interested in the support of their own establishment. We know what fate and usage the first promoters of the reformation met with, and there is all likelihood that the first publishers of Christianity would share the same. "I think," says Saint Paul, "that God hath set forth us the apostles last as it were appointed unto death—for we are made a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men; even in this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place, and labour, working with our hands—being reviled, we bless—being persecuted, we suffer it—being defamed, we entreat—we are made as the filth of the world, as the offscouring of all things unto this day." Was all this, think you, from any liking for an imposture—for what they knew in their hearts to be a falsehood of their own contriving? The epistles, all of them, abound with exhortations to patience; some of these were written for no other purpose than to encourage their new converts to sustain the struggle they had together: "Call to remembrance," says the epistle to the Hebrews, "the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions, partly whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly whilst ye became companions of them that were so used; for ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye had in heaven a better and enduring substance:" "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us; for I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to

come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." And they not only suffered these things, but foresaw that they should suffer them. It was what might easily enough be foreseen from the nature of the undertaking they were engaged in. Besides that, they were expressly forewarned of it from the very first by their divine Master: "And ye shall be betrayed both by parents and brethren, and kinsfolk and friends—and some of you shall they cause to be put to death—and ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." Now if the fact be established, which appears to me unquestionable, that the first teachers of Christianity suffered great extremities, and some of them death in the cause, and for the sake of, their religion, it carries with it the strongest possible proof of the truth of that religion. One man relates a story—it appears to me so improbable in its own nature, that I could not bring myself to believe it; five or six others join with this man in the same agreement; this staggers, but by no means satisfies me—they protest over and over again—they declare it with every possible mark and expression of seriousness and earnestness—this also has some weight; but to come to the truth and certainty of the matter, I pretend that the relaters of this are, and treat them all as, impostors. I threaten them with imprisonment if they do not confess the truth, and retract the story—my threats have no effect; they answer they cannot but declare what they have seen and heard—I carry my threats into execution —confine them in prison—beat them with stripes—try what hunger, or cold, or nakedness, will do—not one of them relents—spite of all I can do, or all I threatened, they persevere in their original story: I consider that

perhaps these people may be mistaken—nay, but I reflect, that is impossible; what they relate is not opinions and notions, but matters of fact, and of such a nature that they cannot be mistaken: what they tell us they saw with their own eyes, and heard with their own ears; they must know the truth or falsehood of what they say—either they are the most obstinate, deliberate impostors, or what they say, notwithstanding all its seeming improbabilies, must be true. I will make, however, a decisive experiment. I will make this short proposal to them; either disown and give up your story, or prepare to suffer death—to seal your asseveration with your blood—some of them do so—what shall I now say? I can no longer refuse conviction.

Now this description agrees in all its points with the case of Christianity. And upon this I rest—produce me an example of any one man, since the beginning of the world, voluntarily suffering death for what he knows to be false, and I give up the cause. If no such instance was ever heard of, I cannot see upon what grounds, or in what way, we can know right from wrong; or on what pretence we can reject the evidence of the apostles, martyrs, and first preachers of Christianity.

XLIV.

PROPAGATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

(PART I.)

ROMANS X. 10.

But I say, Have they not heard? Yes, verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words into the ends of the world.

THE spreading and propagation of Christianity has always been deemed a proof of its truth; because it is said that a false or fabulous religion could not, under the same circumstances, have so sped and gained credit in the world. To do the argument justice, it will be necessary just to state the fact how Christianity did really spread and make its way, though it will be necessary to take notice of the circumstances under which Christianity was practised, whether they were such as that no imposture could have made its way under the same. When this is done, you will judge for yourselves of the degree of weight and credit which the argument deserves.

The account of the preaching and spreading of Christianity must set off from the ascension of Christ into heaven; for it was from that time that the apostles were commissioned to publish and teach it to the world; and before that time the world could not be said to know perfectly what it was.

Now a few days after Christ's ascension, we find the disciples assembled in Jerusalem to the number of 120. Acts i. 15. "And in those days, Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples; the number of the names being about a hundred and twenty." This number will appear to you extremely small; but I think it is not to be supposed to be the whole number of those who believed in Christ: for first, you will observe, this was only in one city, of Jerusalem. Secondly: it was the number of those who were *assembled;* and it is not necessary to suppose, nor probable, that all should be collected upon that occasion who believed in Christ. Thirdly: these were not yet formed into any regular society, so as to be known to, or associate much with, one another. It was not yet either settled or known that the believers in Christ were to meet, or where, or when, or how. The 120, the little knot and association who had gathered themselves together, and joined themselves to the apostles, were probably not merely met together as believers in Christ, but as personally known to and connected with the apostles and one another: all the believers in Jerusalem it could not be, if it was true what Saint Paul asserts, that Christ appeared to 500 brethren at once. I can very well conceive that the death of Christ had staggered many of his followers: not that they distrusted the reality of the miracles which they had seen or been informed of, but because they did not see what it tended to; what was to be done, or what was to be the end and event of all these extraordinary appearances. It did not as yet appear that a new religion was to be set up in the world, or how the professors of that religion were to act or to be distinguished from the rest of mankind; so that they ceased to be his disciples, because his departure out of

the world left them nothing more to do, and nothing more to hope. This assembling of 120 was held a few days after his ascension; for forty days after that event was the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost descended upon the apostles, accompanied with miraculous effects; the appearance of fire resting upon them, and the speaking in the audience of the people in a variety of languages, which it was known they understood nothing of before. Upon this memorable day, three thousand were added to the church. But here, as before, I would remark, that it is not to be taken that these three thousand were converted by this single miracle, but rather that many who were before believers in Christ became now professors of Christianity; that is, when they found that a religion was to be established, a society formed and set up in the name of Christ, governed by his laws, professing belief in his name, united among themselves, and separated from the rest of the world by many visible distinctions—as baptism, the Lord's supper, and the like; when they found such a community established there, by virtue of their former conviction of what they had seen, and heard, and known of Christ whilst on earth, they declared themselves members of it. A very little after this, we read in the fourth chapter of Acts, that the number of the men was about five thousand: so that here is an addition of two thousand in a very little time. Christianity continued to advance at Jerusalem by the same progress: for in the next chapter we read "that believers were the more added to the Lord; multitudes both of men and women." In the 6th chapter we meet with another instance of the increase of the disciples; for we read that "the number of the disciples multiplied in

Jerusalem greatly, and that a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."

This I call the first period in the propagation of Christianity: it contains scarcely more than one year from the ascension of Christ; during which year the preaching of the gospel was confined, so far as we learn, to Jerusalem—and how did it prevail there? They set off with 120; in one day 3000 were added; in a short time after that they were increased to 5000; multitudes, both of men and women, continued to be added; disciples multiplied greatly, and many of the Jewish priesthood, amongst others, became obedient to the faith. This was the first year's increase, and this was upon the spot where the things were transacted upon which the religion rests.

Christianity now began to spread. By reason of a great persecution against the Christians of Jerusalem, they were all, except the apostles, driven from thence, and scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria; and wherever they went they carried their religion with them. "They that were scattered abroad, went every where preaching the word." We read that the gospel was preached with great success in Samaria; first by Philip, and then by Peter and John. Some time after this, namely three years from Christ's ascension, Paul was converted, and found many others professing Christianity at Damascus: three years after which, that is, six years after the ascension, the churches throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, were multiplied in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. This I call the second period; and contains four years, as the first did. First: during the first period, Christianity was confined to Jerusalem; in the second, we hear of it

in Samaria and Damascus; and by the end of that period churches, that is assemblies and societies of Christians, were multiplied throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria. It is worth observing likewise, that there is reason to believe this is far from a full and complete account of the spreading of Christianity: for although the work from which we fetch our information be called the Acts of the Apostles, it is not, nor was intended to be, a history of all the apostles; only of a few of the most remarkable transactions of Peter, and the travels and persecutions of Paul; which after his conversion chiefly indeed employ the history. It is not credible, nor is there the least reason to suppose, that the other apostles, of whom little or no mention is made in this history, were idle all the while, or that their labours wanted success. Hitherto the preaching of the gospel had been confined to the Jews or Jewish proselytes, and to the Samaritans: it was not known, except to the apostles, that they ought to propose it to any others, or admit any others into their religion;—that great mystery, as Saint Paul calls it, and as it then was, was imparted first to Peter, in the case of Cornelius—afterwards to Paul, upon various occasions—and by the report of the preaching to the Gentiles, and God vouchsafing to accompany the preaching by miracles, it came to be known at length to the other apostles and the whole company of disciples "that God to the Gentiles also granted repentance unto life." This being understood, and the way being thus opened, the progress of the gospel became rapid and extensive. It was about seven years after the ascension of Christ that the gospel was first preached to the Gentiles at Cesaræa. Acts x. 44. A year after this, a great multitude were converted at Antioch; as you read in the eleventh

chapter: and at Herod's death, which happened in the next year, the word of God grew and multiplied. Two years afterwards, great multitudes, both of the Jews and Gentiles, were converted at Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe; as you read in the fourteenth chapter. Three years after this—which brings us to the fourteenth after the ascension—the apostles sent a letter from Jerusalem to the Gentile converts in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia; through which countries Paul travelled, and found the churches established in the faith, and increasing in numbers daily. Two years after, great numbers of devout Greeks were arrested at Thessalonica and Berea; and the next year at Corinth. See the eighteenth chapter of the Acts. Five years after this, and twenty-two after the ascension, we find Demetrius complaining at Ephesus, that not only there, but almost throughout Asia, Paul persuaded and turned away much people. Besides these, notice is incessantly made of converts at fifteen of the principal cities in the ancient world. This is the third period; and sets off in the seventh year after the ascension, and ends at the twenty-eighth, and includes nearly nineteen or twenty years; during which there was hardly a city or place in the most populous and flourishing part of the Roman empire which the gospel had not visited, and where it had not converted "great multitudes," a "great number," "much people:" for these are the expressions almost constantly made use of. Now lay these three periods together, and see how the matter stands. The institution which began after its Author's removal from the earth with one hundred and twenty disciples, assembled in a small room at Jerusalem, by the end of thirty years had spread itself much throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. Now passing over amongst the Gentiles, and

amongst them converting numbers, and continually spreading at Iconium, Lystra, Derbe; in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia; at Thessalonica, and Berea; persuading and turning away much people from the religion of their ancestors, at Ephesus, and throughout all Asia; founding churches or regular societies of professed Christians in Alexandria, Athens, Cyprus, Cyrene, Macedonia, Philippi, Perga, Phœnice, Ptolemais, Puteoli, Rome, Lydda, Saron, Tyre; which were all considerable cities: and accounts of converts at all these occur in the Acts of the Apostles, though as observed above, this book contains little besides the history of Paul, and a small part of Peter's. Six of these societies, it may be presumed, were considerable; as Saint Paul addressed an epistle to them. Seven ancient churches are also distinguished, or accosted by name, in the book of Revelations: so that Saint Paul might truly say, as he did about this period, that the gospel had been preached to every nation under heaven—that is, throughout every part of the Roman empire—by themselves or others. First then, the Scriptures cannot well be suspected of exaggeration in these matters—for they never profess to set off, or even describe, the extent of the religion, but are led to mention these particular incidents; such as Saint Paul's coming to a place, and finding the converts ordaining elders, or comforting and establishing the churches, or on some such occasions. Besides that, it would have been a fruitless imposture to have published epistles to Christian churches which never existed, or accounts of the establishment of Christianity in places where it had never been heard of.

The Scripture history of the propagation of Christianity is followed up, as might be expected, by corresponding accounts of succeeding writers. Clement,

of Rome, having known Saint Paul, and been mentioned in Saint Paul's epistles, speaking of that apostle, says, "in the East and West he became a preacher of the word, instructing the whole world in righteousness, and penetrating to the extreme regions of the West." This author wrote about sixty years after Christ's ascension. Justin Martyr, who wrote just about one hundred years after the ascension, has these remarkable words:—"There is not a nation, either Greeks or barbarians, or of any other name, even of those who wander in tribes or live in tents, amongst whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered to the Father and Creator of the universe by the name of the crucified Jesus."

Tertullian, a famous writer in defence of Christianity, and who lived about 150 years from the ascension, thus appeals to the great men and governors of the Roman empire: "We were but of yesterday," says he, "and we have filled your towns and boroughs, the very camp, the senate, and the forum." He then enumerates the several countries already mentioned as believing in Christ, so far following up the scripture account. To this he adds the Moors and Gætulians of Africa, the borders of Spain, several nations of France, and parts of Great Britain inaccessible to the Romans, the Samatians, Dacians, Germans, and Scythians.

Origen, who wrote about 200 years after the ascension of Christ, delivers the same account: "In every part of the world," says he; "throughout all Greece; in all other nations, they are innumerable; an immense multitude, who, having left the laws of the country, and those whom they esteemed gods, have given themselves up to the law of Moses, and the religion of Christ; and this not without the bitterest resentment against them from idolaters, by whom they were frequently

put to torture, and sometimes to death. And it is wonderful to observe how, in so short time, the religion has increased, amidst punishments, and death, and confiscation, and every kind of torture."

It is a satisfaction also to find that these accounts are confirmed by the testimony of Heathen writers, who either knew nothing of Christianity, or were bitter enemies to it. Four principal writers, who were contemporaries of the apostles, complain in their works of the vast increase of Judaism about their age. There is no doubt but that this was Christianity, which they naturally enough confounded with Judaism. Tacitus, who writes thirty years after the ascension, mentions "this superstition," as he calls it, being repressed for awhile by persecution; then breaking out again, not only in Judea, where it began, but in the very city of Rome itself. But the most memorable testimony to our purpose is a letter from Pliny, the governor of Bythinia, to the Roman governor, requesting his advice how to treat this new sect. "Their number," says he, "makes it worthy of advice; for many of every age and order, and of both sexes, are accused of maintaining this religion: for the infection of it has spread, not only in cities, but in villages, and many places. The temples," says he, "of their gods have been deserted, the sacred rites intermitted, and nothing can we find to offer in sacrifice." This same governor wrote about seventy years after Christ's ascension. Upon this evidence, the fact itself of the rapid progress and propagation of Christianity may be depended upon. The circumstances under which Christianity was propagated remain yet to be considered. One reflection, however, is striking; that a handful of men, of no learning, mean in character, obscure and friendless wanderers, should

prevail on such numbers to turn from a loose religion to a strict one; from vice to virtue; from indulgence to self-denial:—should persuade them to quit the religion in which they had been educated, and were at ease; to forego the enjoyment also of worldly pleasures and convenience; to give up ample fortunes, and oblige their dearest friends and relations to leave their country; to offend rulers and magistrates; to suffer all kinds of temporal evils, and in many cases even the loss of life, and this among Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, savage nations and polished people;—that they should do this without having any proof to offer of the truth of what they taught, is altogether incredible. Human nature is undoubtedly the same in every age and in every country: to suppose therefore, that thousands, and tens of thousands, should do then, what no man in his senses would do now, is to set aside every rule of reason and probability.

XLV.

PROPAGATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

(PART II.)

2 PETER I. 16.

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

HAVING given some account of the first preaching and spreading of Christianity in the world, and shown from infallible testimony, that the credit it gained, and the progress it made, was rapid and extensive; we will now proceed to consider the circumstances under which the religion was propagated, with a view to prove that its success under these circumstances can fairly be attributed to nothing but its truth.

Christianity, in our way of considering it, is a history; for it would be received or rejected, according as those to whom it was proposed thought the history of Christ's life and miracles to be true or false. It will be our business, therefore, to note the circumstances which principally distinguish true history from false, supposing the last to have obtained some credit in the world; and then to observe how these circumstances are applicable to the history of Christianity as contained in the gospel,

and published in the very country and days of the apostles and early teachers of the religion.

Now the first important circumstance to be looked for in the history is, that the account be published at or near the time in which the thing related is said to have happened. A celebrated Roman historian, of great reputation for truth and exactness, describes in his history of Rome several prodigies and miracles which attended the first foundation and early ages of that city; but these accounts, notwithstanding the character and abilities of the author, are universally suspected, because those prodigies confessedly happened some two, others three, and all some centuries before the writer's own time; so that we see the writer of the history could know little or nothing more of the matter than we do. Whatever, therefore, be the integrity of the historian, a very slender deference is due to history so circumstanced; in like manner, was an author of this time of day to publish the original history of one of our Saxon kings, few probably would pay much regard to it; whereas, was the same man to publish a history of the last reign, every one would pay it implicit credit. Of such consequence it is, that the original account of the fact be published near the time in which it is said to happen. Now we are assured that this is the case with the history and first propagation of Christianity. There is some difference amongst learned men in the account of the dates of the gospels and epistles; but by the best accounts, they were within thirty years after Christ's ascension: Saint Matthew's gospel probably within nine. As they were most of them written by persons who were present at the transactions they relate, their dates could not be long after; and even if some years had

passed after they had happened, it was not so long after, but that many who had it in their power to detect the fraud and falsehood, if there was any, were still living.

Saint Paul, in the 15th chapter of the 1st epistle to the Corinthians, says that "Christ after his resurrection was seen of about five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some are fallen asleep." All those who did remain, remained to contradict the assertion if it was not true. I believe it will be impossible to produce so fair, so sublime an appeal to living witnesses in any thing which is not founded in truth. But to return to the authority of the New Testament, especially the epistles—suppose the religion to be already preached and known in the world; the preaching, therefore, and the publishing of Christianity, and of the facts upon which it depends, must have commenced some time before the books were written, and consequently very soon after Christ's death. We are told by Tacitus, a heathen writer of great credit, and a stranger, or rather an enemy indeed, to Christianity, that Christianity began in Judea, that it had spread as far as Rome, that there were Christians there in great numbers. Tacitus relates this about thirty years after Christ's crucifixion; if this religion therefore could have spread so far, and converted such numbers, within thirty years after Christ's death, it must have been begun and set forward presently after his death—and this is the testimony of a heathen.

But independent of testimony, there is a circumstance in the nature of the thing, which proves that the preaching and publishing of the gospel facts must immediately have followed the facts themselves, as it is related to have done in the acts of the apostles. The preachers

of Christianity, start where they would, must have set off with this story—that a person who had demonstrated his authority by miracles had left behind him certain precepts, and tenets, and instructions, and commanded his disciples to teach them to the world. Now, had they lain by forty or fifty years, and then begun to hold forth this account, every man's answer and every man's reflection would have been—if you were commanded to teach the world in this man's name, why did you not? what have you been doing all this while? this is the first time you have spoken of these matters—wherefore conceal it so long? A story, I say, thus circumstanced, and first set up at this distance of time, would have carried its own refutation upon the face of it.

A second material circumstance in the history is, that it be published near the place which is the scene of the transactions related: and what makes that circumstance material is, that at a great distance from the place, an historian may relate what he pleases, and such relation may pass current, as those near can contradict little. We in England might be easily imposed upon by stories of pretended wonders in the South Sea, of cities swallowed up in Persia or China, of men of gigantic stature, or of particular forms of body, at either of the Capes: I say such stories may be credited and acquiesced in without any foundation, but I defy a man to pass off, for any continuance, an account of a city being swallowed up in any county in England, or of a race of giants, or preternaturally formed people in any part of these islands; such stories would hardly be seriously attempted, or if attempted, would presently be exploded.

How, therefore, is it in the result with the gospel? I desire that it may be recollected that the witnesses

of Christianity did not run to a distance to put off the story. Jerusalem and Judea were the scenes of the miracles—in Jerusalem and Judea were the first Christian churches established; the church at Jerusalem was the central and mother-church of all the rest, whither the converts in all parts of the world sent their contributions, referred their doubts and difficulties, and with which they carried on a constant correspondence. We have the testimony of Tacitus, as observed before, a heathen and an enemy, that the Christian religion began to be published in Judea. It appeared again, says he, not only throughout Judea, the origin of it, but in the city of Rome.

And Irenæus, an ancient father, who was himself a disciple of one of Saint John's disciples, and therefore not far removed from the fountain-head, tells us that the gospel of Saint Matthew was written for the Jews: and it is plain indeed, from the gospel itself, that it was so, being calculated by quoting the prophecies to convince the Jews, and taking it for granted that the reader is acquainted with the Jewish rites, customs, and ceremonies.

Saint James directs his epistle to the Jews, Saint Paul to the Hebrews, and in all the epistles argues with the Jews, and appeals to them: the churches in Palestine acknowledged and allowed all the books of the New Testament the same as other churches; therefore the proofs and writings of Christianity were set forth upon the spot where the history and miracles are related to have passed, and are addressed to the people among whom they passed.

But what comes the closest to the circumstances of time and place is some of Saint Paul's epistles—Paul

writing to Corinth, a populous, learned, and flourishing city, called the light, pride, and glory of Greece, finds fault with them for the misapplication of spiritual and miraculous gifts, in one epistle; in another he tells them that the signs of apostles were wrought among them in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. Here, therefore, he publishes his epistles upon the very spot, addressed to the very people, where and amongst whom that epistle pretends that miracles had just been wrought. Now the most enthusiastic sort would forsake their founder, if he was to write these long and grave letters, full of facts which they knew to be false, appealing to miracles amongst them, which he never wrought, and directing them to a discreet use of powers which they never had. The same thing may be said of his epistles to the Galatians, in which he appeals to their receiving of the Holy Ghost, and his own working of miracles among them.

The third great article to be looked to in the history is, whether the subject of the narrative be of importance to the persons to whom it is related. If a thing be of little or no signification whether it be true or false, if no concern to the persons that see it, there is an indolence and credulity in mankind which acquiesces in most stories upon the slenderest testimony: or, perhaps also, there is a love of the marvellous which inclines people to receive them. I assert it may be as a matter of course—it is not worth while to inquire, think, or dispute about it. But let the intelligence any how affect a man's circumstances, or prospects, or conduct, or profession, and it becomes quite a different case; you will see him bestir himself about it in good earnest, be as wary, inquisitive, and suspicious, as you please—searching into the bottom of the story, bringing things to the

fountain-head, and fully satisfying himself of the grounds before he take any measure, or make up his mind about it. Curious articles of intelligence from time to time may be given to the public, and they again may publish accounts of monstrous animals, or strange adventures; and other marvellous stories may pass current without a syllable of truth in them: they may continue uncontradicted, and being uncontradicted, will in some degree be credited: and all for this reason—that they concern nobody—no one is interested to inquire into them; but if an event be publicly asserted, which affects individuals or the public, or trade, or taxes, or occupations, or professions—as that a law has been passed, or peace concluded, a victory obtained, a defeat suffered, or war broken out betwixt neighbouring nations—or a plague or infection, distemper or epidemic, rages in countries carrying on intercourse with our own; such events, and such narratives, if they be asserted and believed for any length of time, you may be almost certain they were true: and the foundation of them certainly is, that having others concerned in the truth or falsehood of these articles, they would be investigated, and if false, detected; and also, that those who were from their interest able to inform themselves of the truth would do so before they proceeded upon them as truths; men not being accustomed to act upon slight or slender evidence, and without inquiry.

Now let us see how it stands in this respect with the gospel history. What were the miracles of Christianity? they were of infinitely more importance to all to whom they were preached and related than any thing which affects a man's property and business can be; for upon these facts and accounts being true depended all their hopes of everlasting happiness.

Nor was this all—a convert to Christianity would and must reason with himself in this manner: "If these accounts be true, what then?—why, if they be true, I must give up the opinions and principles I have been born and brought up in. I must quit the religion in which my forefathers lived and died, and which I have all along believed and practised—I must take up with a new course of life, part with my old pleasures and gratifications, and begin a new set of rules and system of behaviour:" this is never easily done, and it is not conceivable that the first believers in Christianity should do it upon any idle, blind report, or frivolous story; or indeed without fully satisfying themselves of the truth and credibility of the history which was related to them, and upon the sole strength and credit of which they took the steps, and underwent the difficulties they did.

There are further considerations of a similar nature to those already proposed, together with some objections to the argument which we must defer to another opportunity.

XLVI.

PROPAGATION OF CHRISTIANITY.

(PART III.)

ACTS v. 38, 39.

If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.

HAVING observed three principal marks and tokens, by which a true history is known and distinguished from a false one, namely, that the history be published near the time in which the facts related are said to have happened, near the place which was the scene of the transactions, and that they be of a nature to interest and concern those to whom the history is addressed; and how or in what manner these circumstances apply to the case of the Gospel history; I now proceed to describe a fourth particular, of as much weight and moment in the scale of credibility as any of the others; and that is, whether the story coincided with the prevailing opinions and prejudices, or was supported by the authority of the time and place where it was delivered. We are all sensible that a story, which falls in with our own previous sentiments and passions, gains an easy admission. When parties run high, on the contrary, the most incredible things told against one side will go down with the other; rumours and reports will be received and repeated upon the slightest founda-

tion, if they confirm the notion one party has taken up of the adversary, or serve to humour their resentment against them; but it is not only where faction and factious passions are concerned, which confound and prevent every rule of reason and justice, but any prevailing opinion whatever will espouse and embrace accounts which support and favour it, with very little examination into the testimony, and, consequently, often with little testimony at all. It is upon this principle that the many stories, which are handed down to us from the early parts of the last century, concerning witches and apparitions, find few people to believe them at this time of day, because we know that such stories might be a mere propagation, or credited upon the slenderest evidence; for there was no more doubt entertained at that time of the reality of witchcraft and apparitions than we have of our own; and therefore accounts of them were received, not as we should receive them, with surprise and caution, or any curiosity to see into the bottom of them, but with open ears, with more greediness and less distrust than any common transactions or ordinary circumstances whatever. Of a like nature were the popular stories that were formerly told of Jewish barbarities to Christian infants. Such stories were put forth at a time when the populace were beforehand enraged against that people; and, by their falling in with the public prejudice and hatred, disposed people to believe and repeat them against all reason and probability. The same observation holds with respect to the popish miracles, which were pretended to be wrought in the dark ages of Christianity. This proved nothing but what was already allowed: they had the popular cry and persuasion on their side to set off with; and it is remarkable that these miracles were never pretended

in Protestant countries, or amongst enemies, where one would think they were not wanting; but the case was, that such pretences would there have been investigated and examined into more than they could brook. Whilst these miracles were only produced as vouchers for tenets and principles already professed and believed, no one was interested to inquire into them, or detect the imposition, if there was any. Every one found himself disposed to credit them himself and pass them to others; but when miracles attempt to make converts to new opinions, and are produced to overturn old and favourite opinions, they will find unbelievers enow: every man to whom they are proposed is inclined to question them; and if they are done upon the spot, they must have the opportunity, as well as the inclination, to know the truth of the matter on one side or the other.

Public authority, also, by stifling inquiry or silencing contradiction, may frequently hold up the reputation of a story that has little else to support it. This remark is also applicable to the popish miracles nearer these times, when it was as much as a man's life was worth to question or dispute them.

On the contrary, therefore, if a story make its way in opposition to prejudice, passion, established opinion, and public authority; if every adversary to the principle it is calculated to establish confess the truth of it, or, what is still more, be converted and drawn over, by having in their hands the means of discovering the falsehood if there be any there, then you may depend upon the truth of such a story, because nothing but the truth would force from men acknowledgement against the bent of their wills and inclinations.

Now under the impression of these remarks, let us

investigate the Scripture history of Christ. Was it backed or upheld by prejudice, by preconceived opinion, by passion, by any public authority? The very reverse of every particular was the case. The Gospel had to contend with all these. So far, in the first place, from falling in with the established prejudices and opinions concerning the Messiah, it directly contradicted the opinion that had almost universally been taken up of him—that of a temporal prince. All the false Messiahs knew the importance of complying with the prejudices, and conforming their pretensions to this opinion; and they drew followers after them for a season by virtue of it. Christ, so far from humouring their prejudices, cut off the hopes they had for ages flattered themselves with; he pulled down the dependence they placed, and the value they set, upon their ceremonies and traditions; he taught that even publicans and sinners and harlots should enter the kingdom of heaven before them, with all their pretended sanctity and strictness; he gave no encouragement to assert or claim deliverance from the Roman yoke, or to expect the independence of their nation, which was the passion of the Jews; he took away, what the Jews could never forgive him for, the superiority they supposed they had in God's favour over the Gentiles and the Samaritans; he called idolaters, with whom they would not so much as eat or drink, and told them that these should sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whilst *they* should be cast out. Was this the way to make friends, to root and conciliate them all to his cause, amongst whom he might pass off false and uncertain stories of miracles and wonders, whilst he gained over their good-will and affection by the flattering doctrine he had held out to them? When the Gospel came among the heathen, it was no

very palatable lesson to them to be told that they must forthwith quit those lusts and pleasures to which they were universally addicted, and take up for the future with constant purity of manners—to be taught that the idols and temples, and splendid shows and daily ceremonies were folly and absurdity. Nor was this history, whether contained in books or in the preaching of the apostles, likely to fare much better with the priests and philosophers of those times, for the plain tendency of it was to ruin one profession and discredit the other.

As to the article of authority, that was all in opposition to the new religion. Pharisee and Sadducee, lawyers and Scribes, synagogues and sanhedrims, their own kings and Roman governors, princes and priests, philosophers and populace, were in arms against it. It was full three hundred years before Christianity became the religion of the state, or at all supported by civil government; so that there is not a colour for saying that it was a state contrivance, or a measure adopted by the rulers and great men of the world to keep the inferior part of mankind in awe. Christ never courted the favour of the rulers or powerful men of his own time and country. He dealt upon all occasions plainly and roundly with them. The event was what might be expected, that he drew down upon himself their indignation and resentment. They put him to death, persecuted his disciples, reviled, threatened, imprisoned, beat, punished, stoned; declared all who took a part infamous and excommunicated; yet we find the force of truth and evidence fought its way through the temper and disposition of the powers which Christ and the apostles had to contend with; and this a temper and disposition ready to make a handle and advantage of every thing which might influence the minds of the

people against miracles which had no foundation. Was this any thing like the case of a credulous multitude, already disposed to the matter which is delivered, and prepared to carry away with them whatever any one may please to tell them in confirmation of it? Is it not more like one who lives amongst vigilant enemies, eager to spy out any infirmity, and ready to publish them, to go on in spite of ill-grounded and idle reports, believing that any evidence short of improbability would gain credit?

To sum up the argument in a few words. We desire no other credit or favour to the Gospel history than what is due to any other history under the same circumstances. If it be found in experience that various accounts of facts published close upon, or near to, the time in which the facts are alleged to have happened; at the very place and in the country where they are alleged to have happened; addressed to the people among whom they happened; facts upon which much depended, or in consequence of which, much was to be done and great alterations made, and in which, consequently, those to whom they were proposed were highly interested to inquire and inform themselves; facts also, the belief of which was recommended by no previous inclination or favourable sentiments towards them, or upheld by authority and the sanction of great men; if, I say, accounts so circumstanced have been found by experience to gain credit without foundation, there might then be no foundation for the credit which was certainly given to the Scripture accounts. If, on the other hand, accounts or circumstances, almost unprecedented in human life, be credited for this reason, that they are found by experience not to deceive; then with what reason can we expect any deception in the

accounts of the Gospel? Why should we withhold from it that assent which, I believe, every one of us would readily give to another history in the same circumstances of credibility?

I will now apply myself to an objection, which many seem to think enough to balance the force of the argument which arises from the actual credit which Christianity obtained in the first ages of the propagation of it; which objection, in two words, is this: If the miracles were really wrought as related, how is it possible that any one should resist them? How could those, however, who saw them, withstand the evidence they afforded? If Christ restored the blind, healed the sick, recovered the lame man who had lain for years at Jerusalem, raised Lazarus from the dead without the walls of the city; if Peter and John restored a cripple to perfect soundness, who had long begged at the gate of the Temple, and was well known to all who resorted thither; if the persons cured, and the circumstances of the cure, were there at hand to be examined, if they were actually examined by the Pharisees, and Priests, and rulers, as they are related to have been,—how comes it to pass that the whole nation was not converted, that the inhabitants of Jerusalem at large did not one and all fall down and confess the hand and authority of God? The answer to the objection is this: That they did not dispute the reality of the miracles, but they did not attribute them to the finger of God, but to the agency and assistance of evil spirits. In one word, it was by Beelzebub the prince of the devils, they insinuated that he cast out devils, and performed all other miracles. We are now sensible that every such insinuation is absurd. For once admit the truth and reality of a miracle, and nobody now-a-days disputes but that it comes from

God. But it was not so then: their antipathy to Christ, owing, as before stated, to his disappointing the eager expectation of being a temporal prince, destroying their favourite hopes and opinions, reproving their vices, and exposing their hypocrisy, put them upon every imaginable device to avoid the proofs of his mission; and this was the way they did avoid it; and, according to the notion which then prevailed concerning the activity and operation of evil spirits, it was likely enough to go down with many. Hence arose their perpetually calling for a sign, or, as it is sometimes expressed, a sign from heaven, that is, some display of glory and wonderful appearance in the heavens as, they thought, became the Messiah, and which they supposed was above the power of inferior spirits to produce. And the Jewish authority afterwards, down to the third century, goes upon the same foundation, imputing Christ's miracles, which they do not deny, to magic and secret arts, which he had learned in Egypt.

The candid, the humble-minded and well-disposed were above such foolish shifts and prejudices which gave birth to them; but these are in every age and every country a small part of the whole.

THE END.

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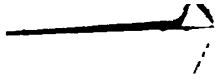

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